

The Big Four

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Summary: No one knew I existed, no one believed in me, and not a single person could even see me. Well, I shouldn't say no one. That's what this story was about after all, the three royal kids who managed to see me through the swirling snow. Anyone who did know of our tale, they called us the big four. The Rise of the Brave Tangled Dragons crossover, Merida/Rapunzel, Jack/Hiccup

1. Prologue

****1/19****

****A/C ****The crossover Rise of the Brave, Tangled Dragon is just so fantastic I had to start a gigantic fic. The original idea was a series of one-shots progressing through their friendship, but there's a few plots weaved through these snapshots. The beginning bit is just sort of an introduction type thing, so it's very short, but I promise the rest of the fic will have more length.

****Ships**** Merida/Rapunzel, Hijack (Jack/Hiccup), slightly Astrid/Hiccup

****Point of View for the current chapter: ****Jack Frost

****Rated K+ ****for romance

****Updates ****as it's written, hopefully weekly.

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><p>Darkness, that's the first thing I remembered. But of course, this wasn't the story of how I came upon the memories of a past life, nor is this the tale of how I joined the guardians on my path to self discovery. No, years before I saved the children or did any of those things, that will later be recorded into the history of the guardians, there was a far more modest story, that will never be well

known-most likely just fade from time itself. In the end, I'll probably be the only sole who remembers it at all.<p>

See, it wasn't very easy existing in a world that didn't believe in you. There wasn't the challenge of living up to expectation or being responsible, sure, but it sometimes got so lonely. No one knew I existed, no one believed in me, and not a single person could even see me. Well, I shouldn't say no one. That's what this story was about after all, the three royal kids who managed to see me through the swirling snow. Anyone who did know of our tale, they called us the big four.

2. Chapter 1: Meeting Merida

_A/C: _This ones slightly longer, but still sort of introduction-ish. Thank you so much for all the feedback! By the way, each chapter's point of view will follow the order of Jack, Merida, Hiccup, and Rapunzel-with the smallest exception of the last couple chapters. And I'd like to announce that indeed there is the prospect of a sequel in the plot bunnies._

_Point of View: Merida
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2/20

* * *

><p>The fire coiled and uncoiled into a ball of light, a shimmering group of snakes, their tongues licking up into the bitterly cold night sky. Unwilling to give into the freeze that was trying to grip me, I snuggled tightly into my mother's lap, feeling the lovely weight of the woolen blanket that lay on top of both of us.<p>

"Jack Frost's been busy tonight," Mum noted, her voice folded with the knowing depth of a story.

"Jack Frost?" I murmured curiously.

"Aye," She said, pulling her arms tight around me. "A wee trickster scurries around in the cold, causing the air to freeze, the snow to fall more heavily, and the ice to thicken."

"Hah!" Da grumbled in the corner, shaking his head. "Ooh, and I suppose the willow 'o wisps lead him where he needs to go!"

"I told you Da, I saw a will-'o-the-wisp before!" I piped up, indignantly. "They are real."

"You're father should believe in magic more," Mum scorned, her voice not even hinting at actual anger. "Willo-'o-the-wisps are very real, and so is Jack Frost."

"Yeah," I agreed, nodding my head readily. "I believe you Mum."

"Good girl," Mum whispered, a smile traceable even in her voice. "Now, it's time to get a bit of shut eye."

"Alright, Mum," I yawned, curling up in her arms as she lifted me to some blankets that lay nestled by the fire.

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><p>Another arrow flung in a fantastic spiral through the air, whizzing to the very brim of the round target. Not a bulls eye, but at least I was actually hitting the wood now. Drawing back the taut string of the bow, I let loose another arrow. This one whizzed past the target, darting onto the frozen surface of a pond, skittering across the surface until it finally lost momentum.<p>

"Come back 'ere," I insisted, jumping across a snow bank towards the rouge arrow. As I ran, the wind picked up slightly, causing the arrow to slide even further away. As soon as I managed over the snow and onto the pond, my feet slid from underneath, causing me to fall on my bum. Letting out an irritated squeak, I bounded back up again. It took no time at all to slip all the way to retrieve my ammo. But as soon as I got close enough to pick it back up, I froze.

At first I thought I was imagining his figure, outlined against the crest of snow, but rubbing my eyes a few time revealed that indeed what stood before me was not a phantom. His gangly legs were perched on the crooked staff he held lovingly between his fingertips, a flimsy blue coat sparkling on his figure, which looked far too thin to actually be keeping him warm from this frost. His silver hair was a tangled mess of tufts, which blended into the snowy landscape. But what really struck me, settling deep into my core and memory, was his eyes, frothing with a buoyant playfulness and such utter delight.

"Jack Frost!" I greeted, letting a gigantic smile break out across my features.

"You see me?" Jack breathed, his grin getting impossibly bigger.

"'Course I can see ya," I laughed, a snort escaping from my lips. "I'm not blind, ya know!"

"Of course you're not, Merida," Jack chuckled, somehow knowing my name. "You must believe in me."

"Why wouldn't I?" I shrugged, unable to see what the point to all his yammering was.

"Not many do-not many can see me," Jack explained, sliding off of his stick and prancing over. "That makes you special."

My smile widened at this thought, hopping up and down, nearly slipping to the ground again. Next to the frosty figure of Jack, I was a rosy ball of fire, my nest of hair tugging back from her face by the soft hands of wind.

"Merida!" Mum's faint voice called, from behind me. A quick glance revealed her standing back by our camp, her hands cupped around her mouth as she tried to get my attention. "Merida!"

"Oh," I sighed, my smile fading slightly. "I have to go."

"That's fine," Jack assured me, his mouth still quirked up in a modest smile. "I'll be back, fireball."

I nodded, the smile returning to brighten up her face even more. "G'bye!" I murmured, before skittering back off to camp.

"Merida, there you are!" Mum chuckled, sighing with relief.

"Mum! Mum!" I breathed, the first snowflake of many landing on my nose. Glancing behind me, I watched Jack Frost fly off passed the large pines that shielded my vision. "I saw-I saw Jack Frost!"

3. Chapter 2: Hiccup

****_A/C: _****Unfortunately I wasn't able to get my beta to take a look at this chapter before uploading time, but I'm pretty positive there are no errors, if there are any I would appreciate the feedback. This chapter takes place sometime after Hiccup's mother died, but soon enough after that the death is still fresh, on the older side of childhood but not quite a teen._

_ Also you people are amazing, thanks for all the follows/favorites/reviews; I hope everyone enjoys this chapter just as much as the others.__
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_**Point of View: **Merida
>

****_3/20_****

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><p>The snow billowed through the air in uneven huffs, as though the flakes were coming from a frosty dragon's mouth. Wrapping my heavy fur coat more tightly, so that it covered my chin, I couldn't help but regret my sudden leave of home on such a nasty day. It really sucked to live in such a cold place. It also sucked to have a father who couldn't take me seriously. In general, life just sucked. That's why I was outside in this misery in the first place, another ear splitting yelling match with Dad. I lost of course, the terms were unfair, I was the only one who payed any attention to what the other was saying.<p>

As I kept walking the air seemed to get even more chilled, the trees around me seemed to suddenly be covered in the frosty skin of frost. And, as alone as I was this far out into the pines, I could swear I was being followed. I cast my eyes around, looking for the mysterious tracker. No one. Huffing, I continued walking forward. There wasn't anywhere I was trying to get to, I was just attempting to get away. I was so tired of the responsibilities of being someone that I wasn't.

Suddenly, half of a hollowed log skittered out behind me, flipping me onto my back. Perhaps I was insane, but I could have sworn someone gave me a push. The imagined slight was all it took to go speeding through the forest on the wooden craft, down and up hill. Miraculously I kept skittering past trees without actually bumping into them. A few times were scarily close, but somehow I managed,

screaming all the way. I slipped out into a clearing, passing from the covering of the evergreens to the icy scape of a pond, frozen so solidly through that my log and I, didn't even manage to crack the ice. In fact, the ice seemed to be freezing even more thoroughly. This whole thing, from the patterns on the trees to the fantastic sledding, and now the overly solid pond seemed to match up-oddly enough-to a legend the elders had told just a few days ago. It was unbelievable, and yet, I couldn't help thinking that perhaps it hadn't been a story at all. Maybe Jack Frost was real.

"Ten out of ten!" a voice whooped behind me.

I whipped around, and sure enough, his white hair and blue cloak dazzling in the sun, stood Jack Frost. Well, he wasn't exactly standing, per say, he was more... hopping, from foot to foot, letting himself skate across the dazzling chunk of water he had transformed to ice.

"Jack Frost?" I breathed, barely able to believe my eyes.

"You see me!" Jack whooped, a wide, dazzling smile splitting his face. "Wow, you actually see me! Hiccup, you have achieved the ranking of two in a billion."

"Really?" I questioned, raising my eyebrows ever so slightly, what could he even be on about? I was nothing special-nothing even close. Sure, some things caused me to be the chief's son-but that wasn't enough to block off the fact that I was the town's failure-the stick who was able to walk around just enough to make a mess of everything he touched. Nothing special.

"Yeah, you actually believe in me," Jack beamed, skittering across the ice to next to me, sliding an arm around my shoulder and grinning.

"That doesn't make me special," I shrugged his hand off, grimacing as I turned away. "Just more gullible-more of a fool."

Jack flew after me, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "You think believing in me makes you a fool?"

"No just-I wouldn't expect you to understand," I muttered, he didn't know what it was like to be a normal boy, who was too old to believe in any sort of magic. Perhaps that's why I was the town's failure. "Look I know you're not real or anything else. I can't waste my time talking to thin air; I need to prove myself in some way. Maybe then I'll finally be good enough for my dad."

"Trouble at home?" Jack murmured, the gust in his voice falling slightly, his feet even touching the ground. "I'm sorry, that can be harsh."

"This is it, isn't it?" I groaned, throwing my hands up in the air as I walked away from the frozen pond, Jack Frost still trailing in my wake. "The end of my mind. Me talking to myself about my issues in these desolate woods, while a figment of imagination answers me."

"No, you believe in me," Jack chuckled, the frost in his eyes penetrated by the deep concern that still stung there from my

previous rant.

"And why would I do that!" I yelled into the air, my breath sputtering out in visible puffs. "Give me one reason you're so sure."

"You can still see me," Jack grinned, now walking beside me. "I would disappear from your site if you had stopped believing I existed."

"Who'r ya talking to, Hiccup?" Gobber asked, glancing at me for a half moment before returning to supplying the hungry crowd with weapons. He wasn't really bothered by how much I seemed to be talking about it, not really, he was use to it.

"You know, I don't need your help to make it look like I'm insane around here," I assured Jack, rolling my eyes at how comfortably he lounged in the window. Letting a small gasp escape my lips, I managed to lift a long sword, over to the sharpening wrack.

"Need some help there?" Jack offered, ignoring my annoyance.

"I've got it," I grunted, barely managing to get across the room under the weight of the blade, obviously needing the support he was offering. Besides, I had survived years without his help, without anyone's help. And I had definitely managed. But you haven't flourished on the lack of help, there's a reason you're the town's fail.

"Sure, you do," Jack nodded in agreement, agily sprinting over to greatly help the load. He didn't speak a word taunting about my incapability, didn't even mention how little I was actually carrying it now-he just did it, just to be nice. When had anyone ever done that for me before?

"Thanks," I muttered, finally able to get into a position where I could properly sharpen the sword.

"No problem," he shrugged, flying back to his lounging position.

"So..." I started, managing to lift the sword back to it's hilt on my own as Jack stared out the window. "How long do you think you'll be staying around."

"A few months I should think," Jack nodded thoughtfully. "I've always enjoyed the winter months here."

"Yeah, well that would explain all our snow then."

"I suppose that would be my fault," Jack agreed, half of his mouth quirking up, into a closed mouth smile.

"You could stay at my place until then," I offered, picking up the next sword, a mere dagger in relation to the last one.

"That would be great," Jack grinned, a light gleaming in the rims of his eyes. "A few months with you in Berk, before I let the wind bring me home for a bit. I'll be back the winter after, of course."

"You'll be welcome back," I agreed, finding a smile trace my own mouth. Suddenly, the nine months of snow we got at Berk, seemed to be the upside of living in this awful town.

4. Chapter 3: Rapunzel's Escape

**A/C: **Because of the unfortunate fact that Flin/Eugene, would screw up the plotline, I have had to erase his existence from Rapunzel's life. This chapter covers what took place in the time that Rapunzel would be running off with her thief.

_**Point of View: **Rapunzel
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4/20

* * *

><p>The sky always enchanted me from the very beginning, the big globe of wonder looming above me, dotted with flickering lights or illuminating the entire world with the golden sun. Best of all was once a year, when the canvas filled with the glittering of stars that weren't stars; flickering, flying boxes of light. But even on nights set during the other seasons, when there was no chance of the boxes of light, I still spent at least a minute or two just staring out the window. There was only one thing more remarkable than the lanterns that I had ever seen on such nights.<p>

It had been early winter, a gentle nip musing at the open window. It had been on one of the rare nights that I had spent alone, and therefore could gaze out the window for as long as I wanted. Gleaming at the very edge of my vision, I saw something shimmer through the clouds, causing the puffs to shiver in reproach. Leaping from the top of the fog, pranced a little boy! I had never seen anyone fly before-then again, I had never seen a boy before. But there he was, zipping through the air with such glee, as though he had jumped straight from my legends book. He glided and swung to the sweet lullaby of the wind, right up to my window.

"Hello!" I greeted, my eyes taking in the scene, lit with wonder. He was exactly like the boy from my book, right down to the spindly staff he clutched between his spidery fingers.

"Hello?" He responded, settling down on top of the frozen flower box. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes, hello!" I repeated, squealing in delight at having an actual person to talk to besides mother. "I'm Rapunzel, what is your name?"

"My name?" he repeated, his eyebrows furrowing in confusion. "You can see me, even though you don't know who I am?"

"I know you're in my book," I assured him, smiling up at the glistening figure. "But I'm still learning how to read it. But I'm sure I'll know who you are once you tell me."

He chuckled, nodding in appreciation. "I'm sure you will. I'm Jack

Frost."

"Ooh yes, Mother told me your story," I piped up excitedly, glad to know who the stranger was. "You paint my windows in the winter."

"I suppose you could put it that way, yeah," Jack agreed, smiling kindly at me.

"You can come in, if you'd like," I offered, standing far enough away so he could climb through the open window. "I've never had a visitor before."

"I've never been a visitor before," Jack admitted, stepping past the flower boxes, so he was grounded onto the wooden flooring.

"Neither have I," I assured him, grinning.

"Wow," Jack whistled, his eyes drifting from the many walls to the ceiling. Almost every surface that met his eyes was splattered with my art, little doodles I did in my free time-and sometimes larger paintings. After all, that had to be what I spent most of my time doing, drawing and adding to the many pictures that revolved around me. "Your art is brilliant!"

"You really think so?" I beamed, hopping up and down as I built off of his enthusiasm. I couldn't believe anyone else would take pleasure in what I did for fun! Mother tolerated it most of the time, but she never appreciated it, not really, not the way Jack was doing now. His eyes twinkled as he gazed from picture to picture. I could feel the gentle buzz of excitement that trailed after him. "I just do some in my free time." I shrugged, well aware of how strawberry-red my cheeks had gotten.

"In some of your free time?" Jack repeated, awed. "But there's so many! How do you manage to find the time?"

"I have a bit too much of that free time on my hands," I found myself shrugging my shoulders once again. "And drawing has to be one of the most fun things to do in this tower." I let my shoulders lift and fall one last time, closing my window and sitting beside it. Absent minded, I traced my fingers over the frozen glass, creating the familiar pattern of the shining boxes. I loved to create them on my window especially, because then I could stand back and see them illuminated against the sky, just like they appeared in real life.

"I'd rather be out of this tower, having adventures like in your book of legends," I whispered, hugging my legs to my chest, and allowing my smile to slip from my features slightly. "It would be nice to be able to actually see the things that I draw."

Jack knelt across from me, so that the two of us framed the window. He cast his legs in front of him, so they managed to match up with my feet. "Someday you will be able to go and have those adventures, I promise." His wrist flicked up, aiming his spidery fingers at my window drawings, waving his hand ever so slightly, he caused the lanterns to peel from the glass, and levitate through the air.

I gasped in awe and sheer astonishment. They were just like the original boxes! The only difference was that instead of glimmering

with warmth, they bore the frozen promise of ice. "They're beautiful," I finally gasped, my eyes tracing their pattern of slowly bobbing around the ceiling. "How did you do that?"

"I'm Jack Frost, remember?" Jack reminded me, laughing happily at how his trick had delighted me. "You may be able to draw, but this is what I can do with ice."

I didn't respond with words, instead let my wide eyes show my utter amazement.

"Can I watch you?" Jack asked, eagerly.

"Hmm?" I questioned, tilting my head quizzically.

"Paint, I mean," He clarified, continuing to smile his toothy grin. "I showed me your trick, now you show me yours."

"Alright," I agreed cheerfully, glancing at him for another moment, I fetched my paint set from a well worn cabinet, and knelt beside the wooden fixture. The pricks of the fresh brush dipped into the splashes of blues. It was time to add a little frost to my collection, to balance out all the sunshine.

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><p>"I'm sure if you asked, she would be reasonable," Jack assured me, shooting a worried look in my direction. "She is your mother after all, they seem to try and do what's best for you-and staying cooped up here forever isn't what's best. Besides, today is your birthday."<p>

"I did ask!" I moaned, continuing to pace up and down my room so furiously that my hair, jerking back and forth, tugged at my entire head. Even my hands were rigidly expressing the anger that bubbled up inside me. "I begged her to go! And you'd think that I waited long enough, that she would have some confidence in me. The only thing I've ever done is stay in this stupid tower and obey her every wish. You'd think she'd let me out of the tower just once in my life!" I knew I was ranting, letting my thoughts bubble up and overpower everything else. But it felt so good to rant, and Jack didn't seem to mind. He was the only one I could rant to, and talk to, and be friends with. "Sorry, I just..."

"It's alright," Jack assured me, hurriedly, the usual grin that sprung across his face was absent, both his features and his voice contorted with worry. "It really stinks, what your Mom's forcing you to go through."

"I just..." I slumped to the ground, letting my hands fall from their angered gestures. "I just want to see the lights."

Jack sighed, sitting next to me. He slung his arm around my shoulders, pulling me into a half hug. "If you had the chance to go see the lights, without your mother's permission, would you?"

"I..." I started, allowing myself the necessary time to consider such a thing. It would completely break her heart, destroy her. But I couldn't help but feel like this was something I simply had to do. "Yes, I would."

"Would you like me to take you?" Jack offered.

"Would you?" I gasped, pulling away from his hug so I could look him in the face.

He seemed genuinely surprised at my reaction, his eyes and mouth widening slightly. "Of course, you're one of my best friends. Why wouldn't I?"

"It's just... wow," I breathed, pulling him into a tightly squeezing hug. "Thank you! Thank you so much."

"Yeah, no problem," Jack responded, panting for breath after I let him go from my death grip. He offered his hand to me, his usual childish grin in place once again. "Ready to fly to your birthday lights?"

"Ready," I squealed in agreement. Without another word, I placed my hand into his, and off we flew. The ground was so very far away, as we flew, that it appeared as simply another one of my paintings. But a painting I could experience first class, the wind blasting us to our destination, the trees below whipped and swayed at the wind's command, appearing as an ocean of movement. In the gorgeous landscape, I could make out an enormous forest, and past that, a canyon, the tan rubble dry and desolate.

Jack billowed with laughter, his voice reverberating around the sky, and filling it with the utmost joy. As my hair fanned around me, a gigantic veil, I joined in with his laughter, letting my own happiness surge through the air.

"This is the most amazing thing I have ever done!" I squealed, shouting so loudly that I wouldn't be surprised if those on the ground could hear me.

Jack just continued to laugh in response, and on we flew. The sky was fading to the fire of sunset, blotches of reds and oranges, and yellows, and pinks; all blended together, as though someone had smeared all their warm colored paints together.

"Come on, I know the perfect spot," he said, even though I didn't have much of a choice but to float gently down with him. We left the spectacular view, coming down from the clouds, and panning into a large city. From our position above, the ebbing sunlight played at the building's shingles, the brown roofs causing the scene to look like a group of gingerbread houses. But then I spotted the castle, which completely blew the gingerbread fantasy out of the ground; but with this addition, it didn't even need a daydream to make everything look like it came from a story book. Its elegant baileys shimmered against the bleeding canvas of sky. Jack lead me straight to the palace, leaping onto a balcony that overlooked the entire kingdom.

"This," he paused, curtsying with over exaggerated gestures. "My lady, is the perfect view of your lanterns."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" I jumped up and down giddily, throwing my arms around him. "So much."

"Thanks for believing in me," Jack simply whispered back, his hugs wrapping around me to join the hug. "Come on, let's get ready."

"Yeah," I grinned back, pulling away.

Jack slipped easily onto the rim of the balcony, patting the spot beside him. I quickly followed his gesture and took my place alongside him. This, this was the moment I had waited for my entire life. It was time to see the lights. The world was quickly fading into blue, real stars twinkling into view. When would this start?

"Rapunzel?" a gentle, surprised voice asked from in front of me. I turned around, and there stood a queen and king, a lantern in their hands. "My daughter, is that you?"

5. Chapter 4: Merida's Marriage

****_A/C: _**_Sorry for how short this chapter is, but I promise it will be longer next week. And on the bright side, it's finally past introudctions._**

_Point of View: **Jack Frost**
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****_5/20_****

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><p>"I wish she'd just stop taking over my life!" Merida complained, flopping onto her bed beside me. "Just for once in her life, could she let me be me?"<p>

The sun was dabbling the ground with the sprinkles of life and light, and as I glanced out my window at the depressingly warm weather, I was extremely thankful I had chosen to visit Merida today. It may be hot this late in the season, but Merida needed me.

"It's my life," she continued, rolling over to bury her face in the blanket. "How come I don't get to live it the way I want?"

"Have you tried talking to her?" I suggested, feeling rather useless. "The state of your kingdom isn't resting on marriage right now, I'd imagine you could at least wait a few years."

"I've tried! I've tried everything!" Merida howled, frustration brimming her words. "She just won't listen!"

"That sucks," I commented thoughtfully. "If there's anything I can do at all to help, let me know."

"Thanks Jack," Merida sighed, tiredly. "I don't know what I'd do without ya."

"Stay on the bright side," I suggested, wrapping an arm around her to pull her into a half hug. "Those two I told you about, Hiccup and Rapunzel, they're part of the kingdoms who are coming-you'll finally be able to meet them."

"They'd better be very bright to manage a silver lining in this mess," Merida simply grunted, taking a long, shaky breath.

6. Chapter 5: The Meet Up

_**A/C: **I'm so sorry for missing last week's update! I was sick almost the entire week, and the long chapter caused me to fall behind. _

_**Point of View: **Merida
>

6/20

* * *

><p>"You know, maybe if it looks like I'm talking to myself enough, my mum will think I'm so barking mad that the wedding will be called off," I muttered to Jack, leaning heavily on the arm of my throne. I could tell he was containing a snicker, but I forced myself to not concentrate on that, I didn't allow myself to turn and see the grin that was bound to be on his face. I knew he cared and wished I could get out of this marriage thing, and that's what counted. Everything seemed to much more real now, the truth so vividly awful as I sat here, waiting. The waiting wasn't that bad-it was what came next that I really detested. They were coming. The three tribes were marching from their boats into the hall as we sat. My one saving grace was that Jack had agreed to come and sit beside me during this monstrosity. Although I doubted that even he could put much light to this situation.<p>

"That's worth a shot," Jack joked, the smile clear in his voice. As he spoke, the large front doors were towed open. In the front of the crowd, three, proud, men marched in, followed by a massive hoard of people. With bagpipe music littering the air, they all stopped in front of us, one of the leaders being ridiculous enough to request a stool for equal height. It was always like this, the competition, the surplus of unneeded annoyance to the process of the clans meeting. "Look, see, there they are." Jack gestured not at the crowd ahead, but at two other figured woven through the crowd. One was an excited lass, her amazingly long hair ridiculous enough to compete with mine. The other wasn't very notable between his potato shaped head and scraggly hair-no there was something noticeable, a tin leg, for an injury far too impressive for someone so young. At the site of Jack, both of them sprang alive with happiness, the girl jumping up and down and waving, while the boy did a small wave and grinned in his direction.

"Hello!" Jack shouted back, he did this as my father attempted to form a speech, for once Jack seemed to enjoy the freedom of having most everyone ignore him. But after all, if what he said was true, we were the only ones who could see him-he was being seen by more people than ever before.

"For the presentation of the suitors!" Mum finally cut in, followed by an enormous shout of applause from the crowd.

I sunk into my chair, overwhelmed by the reality of it all. At first

arranged marriage seemed so ridiculous that I couldn't let it sink in, but now... this was so real, too real.

Next came the embarrassing introductions of each suitor. Each clan introduced themselves, talking about how brave, valiant, and amazing their prince was. This would have been completely unbearable if it wasn't for Jack and Father, making side comments from either side of me. If I didn't know Da couldn't see him, I'd swear the two of them had first prince showed off his looks, being almost as full of himself as his armpits were hairy. The second one couldn't string a sentence together in a language I could understand, but he seemed okayish... The third is what really drew my attention, not because the suitor was special, not even because he was the same boy Jack had waved to, but because of what his father said.

"I hate to break tradition, and I don't want to cause any offense at all, but..." The chieftain paused, glancing around awkward. "After I sent out the letter accepting, my son revealed that he's currently in a relationship-" (Jack whooped with laughter next to me. "Astrid finally saw you then?")-"And I promised to regard that and would respectfully request being able to leave the competition-any other young single man in my kingdom would be more than happy to take his place."

"Understandable," Mum said, to my great surprise. Oh, so it was fine is someone else didn't want to get married? It didn't matter if any others broke the tradition! I couldn't-wouldn't take this.

Abruptly, stood from my chair. Nope, I wasn't going to stand for this. Without a word, I stalked off through the silence, and out of the room.

"Merida!" Mum called out angrily behind me.

I didn't turn around. I didn't speak a word. I just kept walking, tears beginning to sting the edges of my vision.

* * *

><p>I retreated to my bedroom, slumping up against my bed. I drew the sword from a sheath that hung from my bed post and started smiting the wooden frame.<p>

I
wouldn't-

Slash.

Couldn't-

Bang.

Marry-

Crash.

Anyone.

"Merida!" Mum screeched, throwing the door open. "Get back down there!"

"No!" I screamed back, slashing my bed frame so hard, that the blade stuck into the surface. "I won't go through with it, you can't make me!"

"This isn't something that can change-"

"Ooh really? Because you seemed to have no problem having one of them drop out," I hissed, attempting to dislodge the blade from the furniture.

"He has an excuse," she replied promptly.

"Mum, I have an excuse," I assured her, falling backwards as I managed to pull my sword free. "I'm not ready for this! This is my life!"

"And this is our tradition."

"A tradition that someone else is breaking!"

"Someone who's already with someone!"

"So if I was 'with someone' I wouldn't have to marry?" I spat, challenging her with my gaze.

"You aren't."

"If I was." Would her argument hold up? That's what I was really testing.

"I suppose so-but that's not the case. Now, we need to get back to the gathering." Mum took me by the arm, setting the weapon aside, and lead me back down to where the tribes were arguing.

"Sorry about that slight interruption," Mum apologized crisply, bringing the crowd to a silence. "Where were we?" She marched me back to the chair, past a concerned Jack, and into the throne that dictated my fate.

After the greeting ceremony was finished, I locked myself in my room. No one forced me to leave, so I didn't. I just needed to get away-and riding away wasn't going to happen. Mum knocked on my door, announcing dinner, but I didn't respond. As hungry as I was, I didn't want to be with her right now. And she let me be. The only one who was persistent was Jack. He pounded on the window panes and banged on the door, relentlessly so. Until finally, through my bleary mind, I convinced myself to get out of bed, and open up the window.

"Finally," Jack smiled, a half smile, a concerned smile. "How are you doing?"

"How do you think?" I grunted, moping back over to my bed. "I'm getting married. My life is over. And my mum doesn't even have a good reason for me to be sentenced to such a fate anymore-she's just so thick."

"I'm so, so sorry," Jack apologized, pulling me into a hug. For a moment we just sat there, while I tried so hard to hold back the

tears that had been flowing so freely all evening. Finally he pulled away, his eyes meeting mine with such warmth that it was hard to believe he was the boy who created frost. "You need to get out of this room and get something to eat."

"I am not going to dine with my mum," I insisted fiercely, pulling away from his comfort.

"I would never suggest such a thing," Jack assured me, taking my hand and pulling me towards the window. "Me and my friends set up a picnic to cheer you up."

I hesitated. It didn't sound... bad. I just didn't want to have to be around people, especially strangers.

"You need to get out of this palace for a bit," Jack reminded me, smiling sadly.

"Alright, but they should know that I'm not in a good mood," I huffed.

"I think that's a given," he chuckled in reply, running to the window. Without hesitation he jumped out of the window, grasping at my shoulder to keep me afloat. The ground teetered, four floors below, but Jack held me firmly in his arms. Once again he laughed into the night air, flying me over the woods, and to the shores of a small spring. His friends, who I had seen at the gathering, had set a red cloth on the ground, a collection of breads, fruits, and pastries brimming from a basket that sat besides the girl. Her golden locks of hair spilling onto the the ground, almost as splendidly as a waterfall.

"Hello," she waved excitedly up at the two of us as we flew into view. It took mere moments before we were back on the ground.

"This is Merida," Jack introduced, gesturing to me brodley. "And this is Rapunzel and Hiccup."

"Hiccup?" I snorted, glancing at the young man who was allowed to drop out of the suitor competition. "What sort of a name is that?"

"It's to scare the trolls away," he muttered, looking down.

Once again I snorted at his response. "There's no such things as trolls."

"Hello," Rapunzel hurriedly got between his glower and me, her ridiculously long hair whipping behind her. Well, I wasn't anyone to call someone's hair ridiculous, considering mine was the flame ball that it was.

"Hello," I responded, offering a hand in greeting, which she took and shook vigorously.

"As Jack pointed out, I'm Rapunzel," she babbled in greeting, a wide smile splitting her face. Her eyes, I had never seen anything like them, so green and bright, simply glowing with excitement and wonder. "You're Merida, right?"

"Yeah," I nodded carefully, unwilling to leave the comfort of hostility.

From behind Rapunzel's shoulder I could make out Jack and Hiccup, who were silently arguing with each other. Jack was helplessly laughing while Hiccup looked even more disgruntled than before. I wisely chose to ignore them.

"Picnic?" Rapunzel suggested, bouncing away, back to where she was sitting, with just as much energy.

"Picnic," I agreed, nodding slightly, before following her to take a seat on the blanket.

"Sorry about earlier," Hiccup muttered apologetically, seating himself beside Jack. "I didn't mean to upset-"

"No, you didn't upset me," I bristled, tensing at the mere mention of my wretched fate, that he was escaping so readily. "My mother, on the other hand."

"We'll find a way to change your fate," Jack assured me, meeting my eyes.

"We?" I repeated, dumbstruck. There was no 'we', sure he knew us all well, but none of us knew a thing about each other. It took more than one for a team.

"Of course," Rapunzel assured me, her large, emerald gaze fixed on me. Her hand stretched out, offering me a roll of bread.

"We hardly know each other-just Jack," I pointed out, eyeing the bread. I was hungry.

"So?" Hiccup shrugged, taking a bite of his own mouthful of bread. "We're happy to help. I know how awful it can be to have a life forced on you, that you don't want."

Rapunzel ducked her head in agreement, her hyper movements jostling strands of hair into her eyes. "Same here."

"Alright," Jack grinned, as I took Rapunzel's offered bread. "Let's do this. Merida, it's time to change your fate.***"

7. Chapter 6: The Runaway Bride

_**A/C: **For those of you who haven't noticed, I've officially changed my uploading day to Sunday for convenient purposes.

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_**Point of View: **Hiccup
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7/20

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><p>I had been hoping for a bit of sleep-maybe that was too much to ask. Between voyages to distant villages and meeting Jack's friends,

sleep was most definitely in order. It wasn't yet night, but that didn't mean I didn't need the rest. Probably the largest reason I needed sleep was this darn leg; it still drained my energy to get used to its stiff movement. Perhaps that's why I wasn't all that pleased when the snowflakes falling in my tent, woke me from the restful slumber I was beginning to adjust into.<p>

"Jack," I whined sleepily, throwing my pillow over my head to keep the frozen flakes from falling on my head. "I'm trying to sleep."

"Hiccup, I need your help," Jack shook my shoulder, his tone so desperate and serious that I kept myself awake to hear him out. Serious, that was something that didn't belong on Jack. And yet I had never heard him so incredibly solemn in my life. "Merida's gone."

"What do you mean, she's gone?" I muttered groggily, sitting up completely from the comfort of my blankets.

"She's run off, had a huge fight with her mom, and didn't want to take the chance on us, since there isn't a proper plan yet," Jack explained hurriedly, leaping back from me, and towards the door. "We need to find her."

"Yeah," I nodded, climbing from bed, and stumbling out the door with him.

To my greatest surprise, two figures were already gathered outside my tent. The larger was Toothless, calmly sitting on his haunches, his nose eagerly sniffing at the hand of Rapunzel.

"Aren't you a sweet boy," Rapunzel purred, her hand touching down to scratch his compliant nose. "Toothless..."

As I approached, Toothless's ear flickered up, before both of them turned to look at me. Barely a moment passed before Toothless eagerly jumped over to greet me. His massive, scaly body swept underneath me, his nose brushing up against my face.

"Hey, Buddy," I laughed, despite the dire situation.

"Are we ready?" Jack questioned, flying up from behind us. Before we could even respond, he continued. "You two can ride on Toothless and we can circle the forest in search. She took off on her horse, so she may be a bit away by now."

Rapunzel nodded in response, her usual smile fading to a frown of concern. "We'll find her."

Bobbing my head in agreement, I mounted Toothless, happy to feel the familiar discomfort of the saddle beneath me. I patted the spot behind me, indicating that Rapunzel should take a seat. The presence of her weight behind me indicated that she taken her cue. "You might want to hold on."

"To what?" she asked.

"Good point," I muttered, as Toothless bounded into the air, his large wings flourishing out as a silhouette across the sky. The

forest that surrounded Merida's kingdom spanned out below us, the trees becoming a shimmering ocean of green. From our aerial position I managed to pick out the flaming sparks of Merida's hair, speeding down her favored forest road-on horseback, probably. "Alright Toothless, let's cut her off." Toothless whooshed down, quickly gaining speed as he sped through the tree layer, and stopped directly in front of Merida and her steed.

Merida's horse reared up on its hind legs, and Merida fell tumbling to the ground. "Hiccup!" she screeched irritably, running up as though she was about to pummel them both. "What are you doing here?"

"We've come to help," Rapunzel assured her, sliding off of Toothless and running over to hug our friend. "Apparently Jack has a plan."

"I am not going back there!" Merida huffed, stiffening at Rapunzel's touch. "My mum just isn't going to understand. I have found a spell and I'm going to change her."

"Well-" I started.

"That's okay, it seems like you could use a night away from there," Jack interrupted, flying down to the three of us. "Say we camp out?"

"Sure," Merida muttered, her shoulders dropping as her adrenaline ebbed. "Here then?"

"Sure," Jack nodded, taking a series of tents out from a large pack he seemed to have nabbed during our flight. "Here we are."

"Right," I started, and began to put the brown hides together. "Some help?"

"I haven't really tried to put up tents before," Rapunzel admitted curiously, seeming a bit embarrassed at this fact. She said this as Merida bent down next to me, holding up the sides of the tent so I could stake them down properly.

"Go and get some sticks for a fire then," Merida instructed, before she scampered off. "Thanks. All of you. What's the plan then?"

"Jack hasn't really said..." I admitted, while Jack sat on a large stone and watched us work idly.

"It's a secret," Jack proclaimed, watching us with a grin. "I'll make sure it works out."

"Frost," Merida huffed, a growl echoing in her voice. "I swear if this doesn't work out-"

"It will," he proclaimed, leaning his head against his neck idly. "Ah, Rapunzel, you're back."

"Yeah, is this enough?" Rapunzel asked, lifting a bundle of twigs from her side.

"I imagine so," Merida nodded, coming out to take the wood from her and place them in a clear place. Rummaging around the ground, she

managed to pick out a few rocks and began to place them in a circle around the firepit.

"Hey, Punzy," Jack said, leaping down from his perch to pick up a bundle of Rapunzel's hair from the ground. "Looks like you've got something tangled in here."

"Ugh," Rapunzel muttered, twisting her head back to glance at her golden hair that was matted with leaves and twigs, a few patches covered in mud. "I wondered why it seemed to have gotten heavier."

"Need some help managing that?" Merida asked piteously, using a rock and the head of one of her arrows to strike a fire.

"Yeah, thanks," Rapunzel replied gratefully.

"Come and sit here," Merida patted a flat rock beside her. "I can try and do my best. Not very good at taming hair though."

"Thank you," Rapunzel repeated, hopping over to her. "You know, I think it's amazing that you had the bravery to run away."

"I thought you all thought I was just being stupid," Merida snorted in response. "Probably was."

"No, I don't think so at all," Rapunzel answered innocently. "My life would have been so much better so much sooner if I had managed to do that without Jack's help."

"Oh?" Merida started.

Finally I managed to hook the last bits of the tent up and started towards the two girls. Suddenly Jack's stick prodded me in the back.

"I need to talk to you," he hissed, glancing at the two of them.

"About what?" I responded, following his gaze.

"My plan-I need your help," Jack said, his tone more worried and serious than I cared for. That was the thing about Jack, he was always kidding, always havin fun-unless something was really bugging him to a serious level. Now had to be one of those times.

"Okay, what do you need me to do?" I offered.

"For now, just bear with me," Jack nodded, rubbing his stick nervously. "Because this is going to sound insane, and we'll all be incredibly lucky if this works."

8. Chapter 7: The Fish's Funeral

**A/C: **Wow, sorry for the late chapter I've really been falling behind a lot lately. Some of my other writing got into the way. On the bright side, this is a longer chapter then normal, and I've reworked the plot so that now there are going to be 3 more chapters. Lovely shipping begins to take shape now~_

_**Point of View: **Rapunzel

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8/23

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><p>By the time we had set up camp, the sun had bid its farewell and vanished behind the line of trees. Now the only source of light was the pit of fire and the twinkling gems in the sky. After some protests and ranting from Merida, and a few scones that Jack had nabbed from the kitchen before he left, the four of us settled down into the long grass that covered the clearing. Our heads turned towards the sky, we sat in a temporary silence. Toothless was already asleep, wrapped around the fire as if he was guarding the flames. Angest mild about around the tents, feasting on the tall grass.<p>

"And there's the man in the moon," Jack murmured, as the familiar crescent crept into the sky. "Closest thing I have to a parent. You should all consider yourselves lucky, at least yours talk to you!" The tone was joking, but I knew that Jack's bitterness was real.

"Come off it," Merida chuckled in response. "All my problems would be solved if my mum didn't bother talking to me."

"Let's not start the contest for worst parents," I begged, unwilling to bring up the woman I had considered to be my mother for so many years. "There isn't just the moon though, there are the stars, gleaming in the sky. Seems to me the stars light the world up even more. Look there's Leo, the constellation." I waved a finger into the air, pointing to the stars that matched up into such a vivid lion. "And Orion. . ."

"Oh yeah," Hiccup nodded.

"What? Where?" Merida asked, scrunching up her nose.

"In those stars, here," I murmured, turning to where she lay beside me, pressing our heads together so I could see from her point of view. "Right there."

"Oh I see," Merida nodded, the faintest hint of excitement trailing through her voice. "Yeah, I've never been much good at remembering such things. Isn't it rather useless?"

"Yeah, I've just always had too much time on my hands," I laughed.

"You should have seen her old tower," Jack cut in, his voice so full of pride that he could be talking about his own creation. "She's painted this magnificent mural that charted the stars."

"You paint?" Hiccup questioned, interestedly.

"A bit, yeah," I shrugged, suddenly feeling self conscious. "It passes the time."

"She could live off of her pure talent if she wasn't already a princess," Jack beamed, and as I glanced over at him, I could see how wide the grin was as he continued to gaze into the sky. "Hiccup's drawings are just as fantastic. You two should have an art showing for each other."

"I don't really have any of my paintings anymore, you know that," I sighed, almost wistfully-but not quite, because the life that I had without that tower of paintings was so much more limitless, so much better.

"Right, yeah, I suppose there's always that," Jack said.

"There's..." I paused, my hand caught half way in the air as I paused to yawn. "There's the Big Dipper."

Another yawn followed my words, but instead of my mouth, it instead came from Merida. And yet, another, this time from Hiccup.

"And they say they're not contagious," Hiccup murmured sleepily.

"We should probably head to bed," Merida suggested, with a long and drawn out sigh. "We've got plenty to deal with come morning."

"Yeah," I whispered, but still loud enough for the others to hear me. "So Merida and I are sharing while Jack and Hiccup take the other?"

"That seems to be the plan we agreed on," Hiccup nodded, sitting up from his place in the grass. I could barely see the outline of him in the darkness, but I could manage to see him rise to his feet, offering Jack a hand. Jack took his grasp, but still flew up into the air slightly.

For a moment, Merida and I just lay there, our breathing patterns measuring out to co-exist in the same fall. Then she moved as well, lifting herself to her feet. "We're gonna fall asleep before we reach our beds," she chuckled, offering me a hand.

My fingers reached forward, intertwining with her own cool grasp. As our skin brushed against each other, a small tingling sensation shot up my arm. Odd, uncalled for, but not altogether unpleasant-in fact the feeling was completely delightful, if not a bit strange. She brought me to my feet.

"Goodnight," Hiccup called to us, from the entrance of the tent.

"Goodnight!" I replied, speaking to both Hiccup and Jack. "Sleep well! Pleasant dreams. Don't let the bed faes bite!"

"How am I suppose to top that?" Merida joked, halfway to our tent. "Night!"

"And to both of you too," Jack grinned at us, laughter escaping his mouth, before disappearing behind Hiccup.

"What side would you like?" Merida asked, as she climbed through the

hole into our own tent.

"Either one really," I murmured, still filled with the strange buzzing that Merida's touch had created. "This is great, I've never really done anything like this before."

"When I was a wee lamb, my entire family lived in tents," Merida recalled, situating herself in the far set of bedding. "Before I had to be a princess. Things were so much simpler back then, I miss it."

"Yeah well, at least your family loves you," I reminded her, attempting to find the silver lining in her situation. There was always something to bring joy, even in the darkest situations. I climbed into my own cocoon of blankets, turning so Merida's and my noses were almost touching.

"Aye, that's what she claims," Merida agreed bitterly. "What about you? Your parents seemed loving enough."

"Yeah, I'm still trying to get use to them," I admitted, shrugging nervously, a smile still managing to linger. "Truth is, I only knew that they existed a month or so ago."

"Really?" Merida gasped. "Why?"

"You see..." I started, brushing a string of hair out of my face as my smile faded to a small frown. "My hair? It's magic. When I was little, I was stolen away by a woman named Gothel. She raised me in the tower Jack was talking about, using my hair to keep her young. Only when Jack took me to the castle, did I realize that I was the lost princess."

"Wow," Merida breathed, her expression falling, and I could actually depict all the pity in her eyes. "I'm sorry about that. The problems with my mum seem so trivial compared to that."

"Oh no, not at all," I assured her, shaking my head to signal my disagreement further. "Your mum forcing you to marry before you're ready? Never write that off as unimportant."

"Thanks," she responded, thoughtfully.

"Hey, Jack's good at changing fates. He saved mine and now he'll do the same with yours, I promise," I assured her, my usual grin returning to my features.

A tired smile formed on her lips, followed by a long pause where we simply held the other's gaze. Her eyes were so brilliant, shining with the very light of the sky and sea, the raging blue and gentle green fluidly wavering together, such gorgeous eyes, set underneath such attractive red locks.

"I think we should get some sleep," Merida yawned, the words barely exiting her mouth before her eyes closing and her breathing slowing.

"Sleep well," I murmured, still unwilling to close my eyes. Instead I studied the round curve of her line, how the sharp angles of her eyebrows softened when asleep, the adorable sprinkling of her

freckles. Even now, while she was fast asleep in complete pitch black, her hair seemed to glow. While unconscious, it was amazing how her fire seemed to be tamed, her facial muscles so relaxed, the slightest curve to her mouth signifying her content.

The longer I lay there, my eyes still peeled open, the feeling of before grew. It wasn't that of anything I had ever managed in the past. There were so many new adventures and experiences that I was stumbling upon in this new breath of my life, away from the tower, but this churning feeling of such confusing bliss was by far the best thing I had managed to find. Such emotions... as ridiculous as it was, I could only identify as one thing. And the truth was, the presence of such thing would only create pain in such a situation as this. Merida was destined to be married in days, and yet I couldn't help but feel that what was kindled in my heart right now, was a romantic affection for the ferocious red head. A crush on her bravery and spunk, for her snorted laughter and kindness. . . a crush on her. Much time passed before I drifted off to sleep, but that was okay, because for those moment, I could just cherish her warm body sleeping next to mine.

* * *

><p>When I awoke the next morning, it was to find that Merida had already risen and left the tent. I took the slightest moment to sit there and fully wake up, before I dashed out of bed and into the light of late morning.<p>

"You slept for awhile," Jack commented once my head had emerged from the tent; he was sitting on a log that had been dragged over to the fire, a grin spread across his face. A few feet from the fire, Merida and Hiccup were talking, their backs to us so that they were instead facing the large black dragon that Hiccup had named Toothless. "It's so unusual for you, usually you just tend to rise with the sun."

"Good morning," I beamed, running over to sit beside him, eager to lift my freezing feet from the ground and near the fire. "Yeah, took me awhile to fall asleep." I hoisted myself onto the log, curling my legs underneath me.

"No snug palace chamber?" Jack laughed, patting me on the shoulder.

"Not really," I replied, my cheeks flushing at the thought of what had really been keeping me awake.

"Does anyone have any more food?" Hiccup grumbled, walking over to us, Toothless and Merida in tow.

"S'pose we didn't think that part of it through," I murmured, shrugging idly.

"It should be easy enough to catch some breakfast," Merida assured us, pointing to the left of our camp. "There's a stream just a few paces that way, should be easy enough to catch something."

"Yeah, that sounds doable," Hiccup nodded in response, smiling. "Are you both ready."

"Sure," I yawned, still attempted to wake up further.

"Sleepy, sunshine?" Merida snorted, loading her quiver with arrows, tussling her mass of hair out of the way. Still, my stomach lurched slightly at the sight of her, proving that I hadn't been making up my childish thoughts of last night.

"Just a bit," I beamed at her, standing on top of the log so that I could scamper my way to the edge and hop off. "I'll wake up!"

I heard the small chuckle of Jack from behind me, before he leapt into the air, allowing a chilled wind to carry him forward, towards the direction Merida had been referring to. "Hey! We should race," Jack suggested, wizzing through the air around us.

"Oh, that's a great idea," Hiccup replied sarcastically, rolling his eyes as he limped towards Toothless. "Especially since only one of us knows the way."

"I think it should be fair enough," Merida snickered, saddling Angus.

"Hold on," I piped up, crossing my arms as I saw the variable that would really make this unfair. "I'll be the only one who will have to run."

"You can ride with me," Merida offered, mounting the black English Shire.

"Alright," I agreed, running over to follow Merida's lead. I positioned myself behind her, her curls tickling my face.

"You better hold onto me tightly," Merida warned, scooting forward to give me more room. Gladly, I grasped her around the waist, settling my face into her sea of red. I suppose I didn't need to get that close, but I could always say that it would make me even less likely to fall off, if she asked.

"Hang on," Hiccup objected, getting onto Toothless's back. "Okay I'm good."

"Ready?" Jack began, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "Set. . . Go!" With the last word, too much happened at once to keep track of it all. Jack zoomed into the air, quickly disappearing into the mass of leaves. At the same time, Toothless and Hiccup rose into the air as one, the wings drawn back into a more competitive stance than he had used while we glided after Merida yesterday. As they did this, Angus pelted forward, his hooves colliding with the ground in an even pattern, thuda-thump, thuda-thump, thuda-thump.

"We've got this," Merida promised excited, turning to me slightly, just enough so that I could see the grin spread across her features, lighting her eyes up. The two of us rode, a brilliant rush of grey, red, and gold-my braided hair flying out behind us. The speed forced me to hold on as tightly as I could to Merida, burying my face in her craze of hair. Mere seconds seemed to fly by before we had reached the stream, its rapid current zipping by. Of course, the only thing that stood in our way of the lovely view was Jack smirking at us.

"Or we don't?" I suggested to Merida, struggling to keep hold of a giggle at her agitated snarl.

"You're really asking for it, Frosty," Merida growled, dismounting Angus as I slipped off after her.

"I know I am," Jack replied snidely. "That's why I didn't tell anyone else my plan to save your hide."

"Frost-" Merida started, her voice rising to a screech.

"And of course everyone beats us..." Hiccup sighed, landing beside us and interrupting the joking tension. "Alright, so fish?"

"Wait a sec, we're not going to kill any fish!" I burst out, suddenly realizing how the river was going to help us get breakfast.

"Princess, you eat them every week," Jack snorted, walking onto the water so it froze beneath his feet. "It's not different when you catch them with your own hands."

"Oh," I sighed, disheartened.

"It's fine, Sunshine," Merida assured me, patting me on the shoulder. "I can shoot it in the heart so it doesn't feel any pain."

Sunshine, I rolled the nickname around in my head. It was fitting really, since my magic came from a drop of sunlight, but the sudden occurrence of it caused my mind to dare wonder if she felt the same about me as I did for her. No, I shouldn't even consider that, she was getting married. I was so caught up in my daydream, that I didn't notice Merida and Toothless killing the first few fish before Hiccup was beginning to cook them over a fresh fire.

"Aw, poor things," I whispered, sitting next to Hiccup so I didn't have to watch their deaths. "I. . . I don't think I can eat them now."

"It's this or go hungry," Hiccup shrugged, holding one over the fire.

"I don't think I can eat any meat after this," I whispered, more to the fire than anything else.

"I'd make that decision after you eat today," Jack suggested, sitting next to me. I felt a small pang of disappointment as Merida sat down next to Jack. No, I had to stop this, it would only lead to misery. "We're not going to get much more until we return to the castle."

"Speaking of which, when will we be going back?" Hiccup questioned, taking a small bite of his own fish.

"Well, you and I should go back and make sure there aren't any wars breaking out," Jack responded. "Merida and Rapunzel should sit tight."

"Oh yeah, you're going to be able to calm them down," Merida muttered. "They can't even see you."

"Don't worry," Jack said, continuing to smile. "It's all part of the plan."

"What plan?" Merida murmured darkly, a question Jack chose to ignore

"We should probably go back to camp first, pack our tent and such," Hiccup suggested, standing.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" I asked, quietly, looking thoughtfully into the fire, my dead fish still untouched. Jack simply laughed in response, offering a thumbs up.

* * *

><p>By the time we had gotten the two of those set to leave and our own camp situated for the living situation of two, the sun was beginning to sink. Kneeling beside the fire pit, I gently coaxed the embers back into a flame, thankful of the added warmth. It really was a frosty night for late summer, most definitely because of Jack's presents. As I sat there, keeping my hands close to the flame, I noted a distinct rumbling emanate from my stomach.<p>

"Regretting the choice of no fish?" Merida snorted, coming up from behind me to sit beside me, a warm smile glistening across her features.

"No, just hungry," I smiled, shrugging. "I'm still glad I didn't take the fish's life though."

"It still died," Merida responded, but didn't seem to care all that much. "Here." She reached behind her to grab a brown leather pack that was set by one of the logs we had been sitting at earlier. From its contents, she drew a bundle of berries and leaves. "When they were leaving, I thought I'd grab you something to eat."

"Thank you," I squealed, reaching forward and squeezing her into a hug, before taking the food into my own lap. I popped a berry into my mouth, savoring the juicy tart that lingered on the surface of my tongue. "These are delicious! Thanks for not just laughing off my thing with the fish. . ."

"Of course," Merida nodded, wrapping an arm around my shoulder. "I admire you for being able to go without food for so long, and to spare a life too. Perhaps rather stupid in this situation, since we're rather dependent on those lives, but still admirable. I would never let you go hungry for something like that."

"Thanks," I twittered, nestling up beside her. I lifted some mint leaves into my mouth, relishing the soft prickle that added to their taste.

"You know, it's odd really," Merida murmured, staring into the fire. Oh, how I loved the mesmerizing patterns that the firelight cast upon her face. She seemed like the very essence of a flame, not only hair jumping out in a scrabble of red, but also her very eyes reflecting the heat that emanated from the figure in front of us. "This whole situation. . . I'm trying so hard to escape being forced into marriage, onto love. Because I'm not ready, I'm really not. But.

. ." Merida stopped talking, shaking her head as if to clear it.

"But what?" I breathed, my voice gushing with anticipation. Was this really going in the direction I thought it was? Had I not imagined up her emotions? Was this real?

"Naw, I shouldn't say," Merida shrugged uncomfortably, her smile disappeared, taking her hand from my shoulder. "Wouldn't be fair to you."

"Come on," I whispered, moving my own arm over her shoulder. "Now that's just a tease. And I think. . . I think I know what you were going to say."

"Really?" Merida replied, her head turned so she was looking me in the eye, her voice softer than I had ever heard before.

"Yeah, well, if I'm right," I muttered, feeling my cheeks heat up as a nervous smile spread across my features. "But you started, go ahead. I'd hate to be wrong. That would just be rather awkward."

"Okay," she took a deep breath, gripping my free hand in hers. For a moment, we were just positioned, staring into each other's faces, one of our arms around each others shoulders as our other hand was squeezing each other's. "It seems like, I like you. Well yeah, of course I like you. I mean like like you."

Perhaps the hug that I responded with could have been considered a tackle. "I was going to say the same," I breathed into her shoulder, actually shaking with happiness. "I like like you too!"

Merida laughed into my ear, her arms wrapping around me tightly. "I just can't believe it. . . Never thought anything like this would happen."

"Nope, I didn't really either," I giggled, finally pulling apart from her to kiss her lightly on the forehead.

Suddenly Merida's face darkened again, her features flickering with anger. "We still have the wedding to worry about though, I don't think Jack really has a plan."

"Yeah, I suppose," The leap of excitement suddenly dowsed, I squeezed her into a hug. "There's gotta be something!"

"Like what?" She groaned, burying her face into my shoulder. "Walk in front of the clans and say 'sorry, the princess is now dating another princess, neither which are quite set on marriage, so bye!'"

"Wait," I said, finally struck with her words. "But we could. Your mother was fine with Hiccup already dating someone and being pulled from the competition. Wouldn't the same work for you?"

A slow smile spread across her face. "Yes! That should work!"

"Tomorrow we go and tell them," I nodded, breaking apart from her embrace.

"Yes," She agreed. "Tomorrow."
><p>

9. Chapter 8: Creating Fates

**A/C: **I have been so awful at updating lately, and I apologize for that. To be fair, this time I have a lidget reason for missing last week, which is that my beta was gone for the week and I took awhile in finding someone to replace her for this chapter.

_**Point of View: **Jack
>

9/23

* * *

><p>"Jack, what do I do?" Hiccup whispered to me from the entrance of the grand hall. The entirety of the three clans were gathered, shouting out curses and launching arrows at one another. To be fair, neither Merida nor Hiccup's family were causing too much of a racket, but that wasn't keeping them from defending themselves.<p>

"Really, I didn't think this part through," I reflected, shrugging. "Didn't think we'd need to clear much up back here until Merida returned."

"Let's be perfectly honest here," Hiccup said irritably, glaring at me. "You didn't think any of this through."

"That might be true," I granted, leaning on my staff as I looked about at the ones around me. A sudden thought occurred to me, one that caused a spurt of laughter to exit my mouth before speaking to Hiccup again. "But I think I know what to do."

"I don't know if I should be even more worried by this, or. . ."
Hiccup muttered, trailing off.

"Relax, I've got this all figured out! It's time to have a little fun." I assured him, leaping up into the air and allowing a chilly wind to propel me above the surface of the crowd. Quickly, I spun several snowflakes around my fingers, and flicked them into the faces of the clan leaders, sending a few in the direction of some of the more violent clansmen. Everyone in the hall erupted into laughter.

Fergus jumped out from behind the wooden barricade he had set to protect himself and Elinor, and started singing, loudly and uproariously. He sang of battles gone by and hopes yet to come, and as he did this, the others joined in.

"Jack. . ."Hiccup murmured, eyeing his own singing father strangely. "Um, what did you do?"

I laughed in response. "Used one of my own special tricks," I chuckled. "Should keep them all satisfied for a night or so."

"Oh yeah, sure. And if your foolproof plan works, I'm sure a night is

all you need," Hiccup nodded sarcastically. "What could possibly go wrong? It's not like your plan is almost relying purely on chance and emotions."

I shrugged. "I have faith in it."

"You weren't so sure about that a few days ago," Hiccup responded.

"Hey, come on, Merida had started to call 'Punzy 'sunshine'," I smirked, floating back down beside Hiccup. "I think we've got a shot at this."

* * *

><p>Admittedly, even I was surprised when Merida and Rapunzel came through the front doors of the halls during the following morning. Merida's head was held high, her curls bouncing from her head in spirals, and her step slow and light as she made her way to the center of the room. Rapunzel followed, her hair in a loose triple braid that still managed to drag on the floor. As they walked, they were hand in hand.<p>

"Merida!" Elinor scolded, my snowflake beginning to lack in it's effect on her. "You have been gone for days. We didn't know if you had run off, or if you were hurt." She rushed forward, and to my surprise, embraced her daughter. "We were so worried."

"I had run off, at the time," Merida started, pulling away from her mother. Even from here, I could tell how nervous she was, her hands shaking, and probably would have been fumbling around if one of them wasn't already in Rapunzel's hand. "Before Rapunzel came and told me that I couldn't just run away from my problems. And I know now, that I can't let me own selfish needs interfere with everyone else's. But I also learned from Hiccup, who came and tried to calm me down as well, that I shouldn't just take the fate that's handed to me on a platter, if it's not the fate I can live with. When he came to our land, he was pulled from the ceremony because he already had a girlfriend. And now as I stand before you, I have my own girlfriend. We've both decided that marriage isn't something either of us are quite ready for."

"Is this true?" Elinor asked, more to Rapunzel than her own daughter.

"It is," Rapunzel nodded, smiling respectfully at Elinor. "I love your daughter very much, and we both make each other so happy."

"Because why don't we break tradition?" Merida continued, gesturing to the other two men who had been competing for her hand. "Let us young folk find love in our own time? Let us follow our hearts and find our own fate. I say in front of the clans, to not only allow me to stay with the woman I love, but to let my fellows choose as well."

"That's re-" One of the clan leaders scoffed, shaking his head, before his own son burst in front of him.

"A grand idea!" the son exclaimed. "Why shouldn't we have control of

our own fate?"

"But she's the princess," the father gasped.

"I never chose her. It was all your idea," the boy muttered somewhat bitterly in reply.

"Aye, I don't see why we can't find our own lives. Like Hiccup, as Merida should be able to," the other prince proclaimed, nodding empathetically.

"If that's the way you feel," the father of the second prince shrugged, still rather uncomfortable-looking.

"Mum?" Merida persisted, her voice so quiet compared to the usual confidence it generally held.

"It would be unfair to you, to force you into a marriage when you already love another," Elinor responded, her voice just as soft. "As long as the other clan leaders agree, that tradition should be broken."

"Oh aye, I agree," Stoick acknowledged, followed with words of acceptance from the others.

"You are free to choose your own fate," Elinor announced, staring lovingly into her daughter's eyes.

Merida flung herself into her mother's arms at the words, tears of happiness beginning to spur out of her eyes as she clung to her mum. "Thank you! Thank you so much, Mum!"

Elinor laughed, stroking her daughter's hair.

Rapunzel squealed in happiness beside her, jumping up and down in excitement. And I found myself laughing along from the corner of the room where Hiccup and I were still standing and watching the proceedings unfold.

Rapunzel's parents sprung forward to embrace their daughter, explaining how worried they had been for her as well and all those basics. Everything had worked out, everyone got their own fate.

* * *

><p>It wasn't until after the celebration had really passed by that I got a chance to be alone with my friends for a long enough time, so they didn't feel weird having full conversations with someone no one else could see. We were all sitting in Merida's room, Merida and Rapunzel sitting side by side on her bed while Hiccup and I accompanied them on chairs.<p>

"So it all worked out, no magically changed parents or being forced to marry someone," I grinned, happy to see Merida finally relaxed at home again.

"No help from you," Merida snorted, batting at my head. "What was that plan you had that fell through?"

"Excuse you," I corrected, rolling my eyes with a hint of laughter.

"My plan didn't fall through. I was setting you up the entire time."

"I told him it was a gamble," Hiccup mumbled apologetically, shrugging.

"You little-!" Merida stood up, her face flushing with rage. "You bet my fate on the fact that I would fall in love!"

"To be fair, Merida, it did work," Rapunzel assured her, attempting to hold her back with one of her hands.

"She's right, fireball," I laughed, jumping back and into the air. "Everything turned out."

"I swear, someday you're not going to live through me," Merida growled, sitting back down at Rapunzel's tug.

"Whatever you say, fireball," I grinned. "It's not like I'm immortal or anything."

Hiccup and Rapunzel stifled their laughter, causing the tension in the room to fade back into easygoing conversations.

10. Chapter 9: This is Berk

A/C:Made the update this week, if just. Here we enter into the third branch of plot. This chapter takes place months after the last one, if that wasn't clear_

**Point of View: **Merida
>

10/23

* * *

><p>Never before had I traveled by boat, and I admit that it is a horrible, sickening experience. Mum had warned me of this, but of course I had paid her no heed. Even if I had known that she had been right, it wouldn't have stopped me from climbing aboard the ship, not when it meant meeting back up with Rapunzel, Hiccup, and Jack again. It had been half a year since I had seen them, even my Sunshine. Well, granted, Jack had stopped by a bit, but he never stayed around long in the summer months if he could help it, not really his time of the year. We kept in touch, by letters and messages. All of us had our own lives and kingdoms to tend to, even if ours might someday be joined. Not now, though; now was the time for new adventures, for days churning so heavily with adventure and friendship that they spilled over into the next day. Now was the time for dragons and Hiccup's village. Now, was the time for us to all be together once more.<p>

"Here we are, m'dear!" Dad exclaimed "Land ahoy!"

I cast my eyes to the horizon, managing to spot the rocky island before us. My stomach lurched in the happiness, and I laughed aloud into the sunlight, jumping to my feet to watch us near our destination. Several rocky sculptures greeted us in the sea, before

we managed to dock at the rickety wood. Already, one other unusual ship was staked down across from us, one with white siding and fancy golden _; no doubt the ship of my beloved.

Laughing into the prickling chill of the air, I sprang off board, and onto the docks. From where I sprinted off, I could see them at the end of the docks, Rapunzel's golden curls glistening in the sunlight, Jack laughing at something Hiccup was telling them.

"Hello!" I called, rushing over to the greet them. I tackled Rapunzel in a bear hug, my arms fastening around her neck in the embrace, the perfume of paint and marigolds lingering in her hair. "Oh, I've missed you all so much!"

"You too, fireball!" Jack laughed, grinning at me.

"It's been too long," Hiccup agreed, smiling alongside the frosty figure.

"It's so wonderful to see you," Rapunzel squealed, her arms wrapping around my waist. "We need to stop splitting up like this, for so long at least. Urg, if only we didn't live so far away!"

"You could always tie the knot and move in, like you will eventually," Jack muttered, rolling his eyes.

"Shove off Frosty," I grinned at him, irritation only hinting into my voice. Oh, how glad I was to see them all. "Not quite ready for that."

"Once you're all moved in with your stuff, we were going to take dragons out to a special pond I have in mind, spend some time catching up without worrying about our lovely parents interfering," Hiccup nodded, gesturing to a few restless dragons who were flocking beside us.

"Sounds great," I nodded, finally detaching myself from my girlfriend. "I'll meet you back here in a moment then?"

"Here, I'll give you a hand," Rapunzel offered, glancing back at where they were unloading our cargo from the journey.

Once we had returned, free of errands and baggage, Jack and Hiccup were waiting where we had agreed upon.

"Alright," Hiccup said, clasping his hands together. "Riding a dragon is fairly like riding a horse, only in the air. We can take it easy at first, these are some of the better dragons with new riders, so it shouldn't be that hard. You just need to stay calm, and focused upon them before building up any sort of relationship. Since we're all traveling together, we won't really need to worry about steering, they'll follow Toothless and me to where we need to go. Is everyone comfortable with riding on their own?"

"I think I'll just stick with the wind, Hiccup," Jack chuckled, rising slightly into the air.

"If you're sure," Hiccup shrugged.

"Sounds like fun!" Rapunzel clasped her hands, staring eagerly at the

dragons that were stepping from foot to foot, anxious to get in the air.

I nodded enthusiastically in agreement, eyeing the winged beauties glinting in the sunlight.

"Alright," Hiccup murmured, walking over to the great majestic beasties. "Choose your dragons, and let's get going."

I walked forward slowly, extending my hand and looking over the creatures. If dragons were at much like horses as Hiccup claimed, then one of these scaled heads would nose over to me, choose me as their companion-or perhaps that was just in the case of Angus. However, as I stepped forward with Rapunzel at my side, a large red dragon walked steadily towards me, steam billowing from its nostrils as its nose found my hand.

"Hello, pretty," I whispered, stroking its snout. When I looked up, away from the dragon, it was to see that both Hiccup and Rapunzel were already mounted. Hiccup, of course, was on Toothless, while Rapunzel was riding a slightly smaller blue dragon.

"Come on fireball," Jack laughed, already high in the air. "It won't bite."

I rolled my eyes at him, but restrained myself from shouting back with a comeback, so to not disturb the dragon before me. "Alright," I whispered, before climbing onto its scaly back. "Let's ride."

11. Chapter 10: The Tide of Fear

**Point of View: **Jack

11/23

* * *

><p>As usual, once it came time for night, I settled down in Hiccup's room, a place that I took slight possession of whenever I stayed here. I didn't sleep, per se; it took quite a lot to tire me out that much, but the cool relaxation of night was welcoming. Finding my usual spot in his room, I settled down by the head of Hiccup's bed, ready to relax there until morning.<p>

"It's sure great to have the big crowd together again," I smiled, glancing over to see he was settling into bed as well. "You okay?"

"Iâ€"I don't know, really," Hiccup shrugged honestly, climbing beneath his own covers. "Better than usual. It is great to see them all again, have everyone here. But I just can't help but..."

"Worry?" I finished, knowing what had been bothering him for the last few weeks.

"Yeah," he nodded, sighing deeply.

I stepped to his side, so that I could tuck up the covers around him.

"It's gonna be alright, Hiccup. Astrid knows how to take care of herself much better than most ever manage in their lifetime; she'll be fine. You just need to hang in there alright? Be her waiting maiden for when she returns."

"I suppose," Hiccup nodded sleepily, yawning once again. "G'night, Jack."

"Goodnight, sweet dreams," I murmured in reply, sitting back down at his windowsill next to his bed. Toothless purred slightly in his own version of saying goodnight, before curling up next to Hiccup protectively. It was adorable, the way Toothless had slept beside Hiccup every night since Astrid had left and his worry had been so constantly noticeable.

Even then, Hiccup took hours to drop off to sleep, before his breathing finally evened out. And watching his fall asleep relaxed me as well, so I contented myself with watching his chest gently rise and fall. Still I waited for the definite sign of him being completely plunged into sleep, which was the presence of Sandman's dreamsand. Hours passed, and I continued to wait during what must have been the early hours of the morning. Something was very wrong with whatever sleep Hiccup was having. I rose to my feet, pacing over to stand beside him, and watch his fretful face, which was scrunched up and tense. His breathing wasn't even coming easily now.

"Hiccup?" I whispered, my voice strained.

He continued to fret, his head tossing about.

"Come on Hiccup, it's alright, everything's alright," I murmured, hoping that he was at least awake enough to hear me. I moved my hand forward, stroking his shoulder, and patting his hair down. To my great surprise, he did relax at this motion, and he fell back to soothed breathing. As I continued to rub my hand back and forth across his shoulder blades, I watched as dreamsand found its way through the window and cradled his head with dreams.

As Hiccup and I made our way to the main hall for breakfast, I attempted to pretend that I didn't notice how much Hiccup stumbled and tripped on the walk there, or how his eyes held such heavy packages underneath his lids. When we arrived at the table, the meal was already set out for us, and both Merida and Rapunzel were sitting side by side, conversing quietly together.

"Good morning!" Rapunzel greeted cheerily, smiling at us both with bright eyes and a small wave.

"Morning," Merida murmured in an echo, emitting a large yawn. "As you can all see, Rapunzel somehow seems to possess her cheeriness and even the most frighteningly early hours of the morning."

"No, silly," Rapunzel booped Merida's nose, which caused another wave of yawns to roll across Merida's features. "Eight in the morning isn't early."

"You should see her at dawn," I chuckled, sliding in a chair across from them, next to Hiccup, who still looked far too forlorn and tired. "Up at the first crack of daylight with as much energy as ever."

"She's the freaking sun on earth," Merida grumbled, letting her head crumple down onto her arms on the table.

"Thanks, Merida," Rapunzel continued to grin ever so brightly.

"I wouldn't be so sure that's a compliment," Merida grumbled in response, her head still down. While they continued to flirt, I studied Hiccup. He sat slumped over his meal, his fork playing with the fish on the plate before him, his adorable tufts of hair sliding over his face.

"Are you alright?" I murmured, leaning in to close the proximity between his ear and me, my voice soft enough, so that Merida and Rapunzel weren't even slightly distracted by my movement.

Hiccup shrugged in response.

"Hey, it's going to be alright," I promised, setting my hand around his shoulder and squeezing it.

"They're returning!" A faint voice called from outside, claiming Hiccup's attention. "Dragon on the horizon!"

Hiccup stood abruptly from the table, biting his lips nervously. He turned to the rest of us, a spark in his eye. "She's finally back-she has to be."

I nodded in assurance, before we all dashed out through the doors, finding ourselves back where Merida and Rapunzel had first arrived; at the docks. There, my stomach dropped, and I flew to stand beside Hiccup, who had stopped in his tracks feet from the shoreline. There, I saw the oncoming tatters of a dragon, hurling itself forward in a crash landing that dove into the shoreline, skinning the grass from the dirt it had intercepted. I watched Hiccup begin to clench and unclench his fingers, his breathing exiting in shallow pants, as his eyes were glued to the rider with a nervous panic that clenched his heart and rattled it about in his stomach. For this single passenger was not Astrid.

"Come on, Hiccup," I murmured, my hand reaching forward to touch upon his shoulders, taking him from his utter shock. "Let's see what's going on." We both were perfectly aware of the broad picture of what these happenings referred to, but maybe the details moved around the puzzle pieces, forming the solution to be something that wouldn't be so destructive to Hiccup. We did move closer, tentatively pushing through the crowd. Stoick was already there, knelt down beside the crashed Viking, who lay crouched in a position so close to where he had fallen.

"What happened?" Stoick questioned worriedly, his voice staying calm. "What happened to the others?"

"The storm-the waves of blackness came upon us at nightfall and buried the ship, pulling dragons out of the sky, and down into the watery depths," the survivor explained, his voice a feeble shakiness. "No other's survived."

Hiccup froze beside me, and I could no longer feel the ebb and flow of his breath, he just stopped.

"Come on, buddy," I whispered, gripping his shoulder so hard that I must have sent a shot of ice into his system. However, this did get him going, and he moved into motion, his breath coming in gasps, and his feet staggering back and forth.

"Black wave?" Stoick responded, his confusion clear. "You mean the sea?"

"No, not exactly," the survivor rasped. "It was the ocean without liquid, glittering with malice and fear as it came upon us, soaring higher than water could ever muster, and drowning everyone out. It was as though Hel was upon us with all her forces..."

"You're safe now," Stoick reminded him gravely, rising to his feet. "Somebody bring him into be treated." He lifted his gaze to the thrashing ocean that he had flown across, his gaze far away.

Suddenly Hiccup turned, shrugging off my hand, he sprinted away as quickly as he could with his mechanical leg, making for the woods. Toothless was faster than I, and managed to speed towards Hiccup, nuzzling the Viking affectionately, worriedly. Before I had the chance to call out, Hiccup bounded onto Toothless's back, before the two of them flew off together into the morning air.

"What's going on?" Merida asked, coming to stand beside me.

"Astrid's dead," I explained, my voice quivering as I took a deep breath. "The voyage she had taken a month ago sank, apparently. I need to go after him. You both just... stay here. We should be back soon."

Merida nodded seriously, concern dotting across her features as well. "We'll be here."

"Thanks," I said in response, before flying up into the sky. Thankfully, I didn't even need to track the already vanished Toothless to find Hiccup, I knew that he had gone to the place he disappeared to when ever anything upsetting came his way: the pond. It took me only a moment to shout back to the earth, centralizing myself towards the water that Hiccup had first come across Toothless so many months ago. As I came closer, I could spot Toothless running along the shore, thrusting pebbles into the watery depths, forcing them to bounce upon the surface.

Silently, I landed behind him, watching his agitated movements for a fraction of a moment. "Hiccup," I murmured, causing him to pause, before throwing another rock forward, with too much force for the flat surface to skip across the water. Stepping forward, I could see red lines of tears streaking his cheeks, his eyes bright pink from crying.

"It's not-" Hiccup hurled another stone forward, this time missing the water entirely so that it flew onto the opposite bank. "-fair! How can...Why would she...Jack, how come Astrid's dead?" He turned towards me, so utterly hopeless, his shoulders drooped, and his mouth parted in the singular question of why.

"Oh, Hiccup," I sighed, stepping forward to look him fully in the face. "I know it's not fair or right of any of that shit. And I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry."

Hiccup suddenly collapsed onto his knees, the next rock tumbling from his hands. For a moment, he didn't make any sort of movement or sound, which was more worrying than screams of agony in this case.

Quickly, I flew to his side. I threw my arms around him, bending down beside him to hold him in my grasp. "It's okay, Hiccup, I understand. Just let it all out. Just let it all out..."

Hiccup relaxed into my grasp, shaking with sobs. For he did let it all out now, allowed his every breath to emanate tears. Which was good, because in the end there was no fix for death, just the release of bottled-up emotions. And I would be there for him through the entire thing.

12. Chapter 11: Mourning in Morning part 1

**A/C **This chapters being split into two parts because tension and loveliness. So this is the first chapter. Also, as I'm updating this one, I'm realizing that last chapter was in the wrong point of view and should have been Rapunzel, but that doesn't really work with the chapter anyway so sorry about that._

**Point of View: **Jack_

12/23 (first half)

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><p>The next few days obviously didn't pass in the smooth sunny happiness that we were expecting this get together. It was frightening to see Hiccup down, to all of us I do believe. There was no eye rolling smiles or sarcastic comments, just an uneasy happiness that came from him. We went through with most of what we had planned, but none of the joy we could have been having penetrated his sorrow. And I just...it destroyed me to see him so completely defeated, a grey cloud of misery surrounding him. I cared so much about him and I had never been in this sort of experience before, with a friend so completely decimated by sadness-anger and betrayal, yes, but this was something entirely different. It was nearing the end of the other's stay here, and even though I wasn't going to leave with them, I was worried about what this change would do to Hiccup.<p>

"I'm gonna stay with him for awhile longer," I announced to Merida and Rapunzel after he had gone to bed earlier, the night before they left. "Make sure he's alright."

"I think that's wise," Rapunzel replied softly, sighing deeply from where she sat in Merida's lap. "A heart isn't something easily fixed, especially when death is involved. I wish there was something we could do to help, but I can't think of what."

"Yeah," Merida murmured, resting her chin on Rapunzel's shoulder. She eyed me carefully, her green eyes glimmering questioningly. We sat there for a few moments, before she spoke again, catching me off

guard. "You like him, don't you? I mean, as more than a friend."

"Wh-what?" I sputtered, reeling back in surprise. "How do you figure that? I mean-" I paused, letting her words sink in. I mean, as more than a friend. No, but that was the problem, it made sense; it caused something to click in my head; my cheeks to flush and my head to reel. Maybe there was a good reason that his sadness impacted me so greatly, more than Rapunzel mourning over her birth mother being different from the woman who raised her, and Merida running away from her prison sentence of a fate. The pause seemed telling enough, but I still felt the need to continue. "-I don't know." No, this really wasn't fair, not to anyone, and especially not now. Hiccup was trying to get over his dead girlfriend who was probably going to be his wife! I was a strange snow creature who couldn't be seen by 99.99% of the world's population. Oh yeah, I'm sure his father would understand, Hiccup was just going out with his imaginary friend.

"You should talk to him," Merida continued, nodding at me encouragingly. "He needs to know you're so completely there for him."

"Um, I'm not sure if you've noticed, but his girlfriend just died," I hissed in response. "How the hell would it be helpful for him to know that his best friend has romantic emotions for him?"

"Maybe it wouldn't be helpful anytime soon, but for him to know that you're that unspeakably with him," Rapunzel continued her girlfriend's thought. "It's entirely your call. But you're right, that's probably the last thing he needs to hear about right now. I'm confident you'll know to do the right thing, you're very good at looking after Hiccup."

"Not...really, but thanks," I sighed, slumping over in my chair.

Rapunzel yawned widely. "We should probably head to bed ourselves, big voyage tomorrow and all."

"Right, that," Merida replied irritably, shoving Rapunzel off of her lap. "I suppose you're right, as always, sunshine. Take care, Jack."

"Right yeah, sleep well," I nodded thoughtfully, sighing deeply. I couldn't help but feel irritated towards Merida for pointing all this out at such a detestable time. It wasn't her fault, not really, she wasn't the one who made this complicated, it was me. For a few more moments, that drew into minutes, that lengthened to nearly a half an hour, I sat there after Rapunzel and Merida had left for bed. Finally, I left for Hiccup's cabin, not to sleep, but to make sure he was managing to get the rest he so desperately needed. He was, or at least appeared to be, so I sat by the window, and contented myself with watching him sleep as I tried to muddle through my own thoughts.

13. Chapter 11: Mourning in Morning part 2

_**A/C **Second part of the twelfth chapter. Since this is the last

chapter in the part where they're at Jack's, I'm going to go on a small hiatus. This is just so I don't have to worry about the constant updating during finals and can get a few chapters ready so I can update it more consistently once I return. But yeah, this shouldn't last for more then to the end of the school year. No worries, there's no chance of me completely leaving this fic until it's finished, I'll continue writing, it's to just take the pressure off for a bit. Enjoy the Hijack!_

**Point of View: **Jack

12/23 (second half)

* * *

><p>"I'm going to miss you all so much," Rapunzel sighed, parting from her hug with Merida, to attack me with her limbs flailing. "We can't wait for so long to pass again, we must find a way to get together sooner this time."<p>

"Agreed," Merida nodded. "Six months is too long. Hang in there dragon rider, I'm gonna miss you."

"You too," he responded, nodding mournfully, a deep sigh escaping his lips. "Goodbye. I'm sorry for-"

"No. No, don't do that," Merida hissed, shaking her head. "Don't blame yourself. That's not fair. Besides, all of us completely understand."

"Yeah, totally," I emphasized, slinging a hand around his shoulder. "We're here for you, buddy, no apologies necessary."

"Right, thanks," Hiccup murmured in response.

"Come on Merida!" Fergus called out from his ship, beckoning with a large hand.

"Coming, Dad," Merida waved her hand in acknowledgment. Sighing loudly, she then directed her hand towards all of us in a large wave. "G'bye all of you. I'll miss you lots, see you soon hopefully. Jack, you better stop by soon, you here?"

"Alright," I responded, offering a nod and a smile. "Goodbye Merida!"

"Goodbye," Hiccup nodded.

Ignoring Merida's hand in the air, Rapunzel attacked Merida with another hug, throwing her arms around the red head, and kissing her on the lips. "Goodbye, fireball! I love you!"

Merida toppled back slightly on impact, her face flushing with a large smile. "You too, sunshine!"

"Merida!" Fergus called once again.

"Coming!" Merida assured him, pulling away to run up the dock, and up into their ship.

"Well, I probably should be going as well," Rapunzel sighed regretfully, eyeing her own family mount their ship. "I'll miss you both! Goodbye!" Throwing her arms around the two of us quickly, she sprinted up to her own way home.

"Goodbye," I called after her, sighing. Without bothering with any other words, Hiccup and I stood there on the shore, watching their vessels carry them far, far away. Once their wooden sidings had completely disappeared from view, we turned away and went to have our lunch for the day.

The next few risings and settings of the sun happened without much else going on. Both of us were rather exhausted by people and Hiccup was still mourning. He didn't bother hiding his sadness, but he didn't really let it out either, just leaving his in a blank state of depression that tears didn't dare touch. Except for at night, then he went so far as to completely leave his blankness and let the tears run, which became soaked up within the folds of his pillows. That's when I could properly comfort him.

"I need to go for a ride," Hiccup finally said, a morning that lived a few weeks after the two girls had left. "Will you come with me?"

"Of course," I nodded, noting this was the first time he had said a full sentence in days. The two of us went outside to where Toothless quickly trotted up to Hiccup's side.

"Could you ride on Toothless with me, just this one time?" Hiccup asked, knowing perfectly well that I preferred to fly alongside him on the wind.

"Sure," I replied, frowning slightly in my curiosity. Hiccup mounted Toothless and I followed his lead, wrapping my arms around his waist so that I wouldn't fly off into the wind. "Where are we going?"

"I don't know," Hiccup responded, shifting his feet into the gears as Toothless took flight. It was good, to see him talking again. He wasn't necessarily happy, but it wasn't the same despairing sadness either. We flew for a few moments in silence, Toothless simply circled the air, rising high into the sky, until we were above the cloud layer. "You know, I've been thinking a lot lately."

"I imagine so," I nodded, staring around at the clouds that circled our feet. It really was different up close, Hiccup's body heat beneath my own icy arms.

"About Astrid, obviously, about our time together," he continued, and I listened carefully, realizing it was the first time he had said her name since the incident. "And also about just life in general; how short and unexpected it is. And I've been thinking about that night a few weeks ago."

"What night?" I inquired after he didn't elaborate.

"I know I wasn't suppose to hear it, but I had been coming back to ask you all something," Hiccup started, and my heart plummeted as though I had dropped from the high altitude we now flew at. "But the conversation you had, that night before Merida and Rapunzel left, stopped me from entering. So I just stood there, frozen to the spot,

listening to you confess to them how you felt about me."

"Oh jeez, Hiccup I'm sorry," I apologized, my face heating up to such an extent that I felt like I was going to melt the rest of my body. "I didn't mean for you to hear that..."

"Why are you sorry?" he questioned, and I found myself befuddled by his response.

"Because life's confusing enough without me complicating it for you," I answered, finding the response obvious.

"Don't be sorry," he murmured. We traveled onwards for a moment longer in silence before he continued. "It actually...well, it helped me out more than you'd think. You weren't here before Astrid left...didn't see that it looked like we were moving into the point of just being friends. And I...it was my fault really, and she didn't deserve it-especially now. But yeah, it...it helps to know that you feel the same way."

"Oh," I muttered, letting his words sink into my skull. It helps to know that you feel the same way. All this time, he had felt it, not only had he felt it, but he was aware that they were aware. I had to have Merida point them out to me! "That's...good. That's really good to hear."

"Yeah," Hiccup nodded, leaning up against me.

"So..." I continued, fumbling over my words slightly. "Would you like to go out with me?"

"Yeah...yeah that sounds good," Hiccup nodded, sighing into the thin air of this high level.

"So are you going to start talking now?" I teased, knowing that he was perfectly aware that I wasn't so lighthearted to just mean that with those words. Are you doing alright, then? Is this too much? Have you gotten over Astrid enough to breathe?

"I think so," Hiccup murmured, nodding slowly. But we didn't rush our voices into action, instead the two of us enjoyed the rest of the flight in a very comfortable silence, before we rested onto the ground, and I was able to watch Hiccup get his first rest for months.

14. Chapter 12: The Return of Fear

**A/C **Hiatus finally over! I actually finished the fic during the last few weeks so unless something else gets in the way, I should be able to update weekly once again. Also, I just want to address some reviews I've been getting lately that have been attacking/asking about the character's sexualities. In this fic, I'm not saying that any of these characters canonically like the opposite gender but instead am exploring their romantic relationships if they did end up liking each other that way, as many fics do. Anyways, enjoy this chapter and the many to come!_

**Point of View: **Merida
>

13/23

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><p>Time passed as it generally did, a confusion of slow-downs and speed-ups, and luckily, as I stood by the docks, waiting expectantly for Rapunzel, Jack, and Hiccup to arrive, it wasn't the first time we had seen each other since Astrid's death. If that had been the case, I don't think I would have been able to stand it-two and a half years is far too long for that to happen. We had met satisfyingly often enough, but more, of course, would have been preferred. Jack stopped by at least once a month to check in, if not staying longer. Hiccup, of course, I saw less, but I managed to find a way to see him every few months, never going as long as our first departure from each other's company. He was doing better now, much better. Rapunzel and I had met every few months, convincing our parents that it was important to see each other's glimmering faces-which, of course, it was; very important. So important that the two of us were the whole reason we were all gathering together this time. I still felt slightly uncertain about the whole thing, especially since I had formally rebelled the idea so entirely before. But this time it didn't involve a complete stranger, but instead the woman I couldn't bear to live a life where we were so far apart. This time, I was ready for my betrothal.<p>

Jack was the first one that I saw, zooming through the air ahead of the others, his pale blue figure barely visible as he was illuminated against the light glow of the afternoon sky. He rushed to my side, landing beside me, his feet lightly touching up against the ground.

"Merida!" he greeted, beaming at me.

"Jack, good to see you!" I responded, grinning back.

"You too," he responded instantly, leaning on his staff joyfully. "Are you ready for this?"

"I think so," I answered, ducking my head slightly. "Still feels rather odd, but I do want this."

"Good, you two deserve each other," Jack reassured, smiling.

"Are the others coming?" I prompted, gazing back out into the sea.

"I rode with Hiccup partway here; they're traveling by dragons, so it shouldn't be long. I haven't seen any from Rapunzel's kingdom yet, though."

"Well, it's still early in the day," I assured myself more than him, nodding. Before long, the dragons were visible on the horizon line, darting about in their array of scales. Their bodies shifting in and out of the sunlight, an arc of dragons and riders sailing the skies, until they eventually landed orderly onto the docks. Hiccup rushed over to us, grinning joyfully.

"Hello!" Hiccup greeted, standing between the two of us in his greeting, looping his arms up around our shoulders, which turned out

to be very awkward, considering both of us were a head taller than him at least.

"Hey, Hiccup," I greeted with a snort. But this time, although I may have been glad to see him, I was worried by the fact that we hadn't heard or seen any mention of my bride.

"What's wrong?" Hiccup asked, immediately able to detect the unease.

"Rapunzel hasn't been seen or heard from," I murmured worriedly, glancing about.

"I'm sure she's fine, fireball," Jack assured me. "She's sailed these seas numerous times without problems." I didn't want to voice my fears that were hardly comforted by Jack's words. If I did, it would cause just as much fear within Hiccup, who knew exactly how awful it was to lose someone at sea. For what plagued my mind now was the story of the black storm that had taken Astrid.

"Right," I murmured restlessly. "Oh, here's someone." I moved away from my two friends and towards the shore, where a small row boat was being brought about by a royal guard. His face was something of grave panic, and my heart sunk.

"What happened?" I asked urgently, amongst a few who had helped pull him to shore.

"Princess Merida," he started breathlessly, bowing shortly before me. "Princess Rapunzel has vanished."

15. Chapter 13: Time for Travel

**A/C **Wow I'm sorry I've really dropped the ball the last few weeks as I've been out of town with dicey internet._

Anyways here you are, I promise longer chapters will come in soon.

_**Point of View: **Hiccup
>

14/23

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><p>Merida was stooped over the single man who had come in the place of Rapunzel's kingdom. I couldn't hear what she was saying, but I saw how her already tense features bloom into a fierce anger. She stood from the guest abruptly, and marched off towards the castle without even stopping to communicate with us.<p>

"Merida, where are you doing?" Jack called out, flying after her as I followed in his footsteps.

"I'm going to get my bow and any supplies I'll need," Merida replied clippedly, rage coursing through her voice. Not only rage, but fear, which was the core of the emotion-the anger was only the backlash. So whatever spite she was showing now, it was only a fraction of the

amount of sorrow she was concealing. If I had learned anything about Merida in my time as her friend, it was that.

"Merida, what happened?" Jack asked, still being the only one close enough to properly converse with her. Both of them were striding away at such a frightening pace that I could hardly manage with my bad leg.

"She has Rapunzel," Merida answered, finally stopping to turn and face Jack, tears glistening in her eyes. "That witch has Rapunzel. Jack, she took her back." She turned, seeming to notice that I was there once again.

"Oh," Jack breathed in response, any happiness he contained vanishing completely.

"But, Merida, we can't just rush into this or be this rash," I reasoned, feeling as though the wind had been knocked from my lungs at the news of happy, kind, Rapunzel back into the hands of that awful witch who had imprisoned her for most of her life.

"Hiccup, if you think I'm just going to sit here while Rapunzel's out there in danger, you've got a few arrows flying your way!" Merida screeched at me, turning to give me the fiercest glance I have ever received in my life. Well, and I've lived with dragons and my dad, too.

"I'm not saying that you should," I growled, rolling my eyes at the idea of us restraining her from this. "I'm saying you can't go out there after her on your own."

"Yeah," Jack chimed in, realizing where I was going with this. "We're going after her together."

"Fine," Merida responded quickly, her eyes revealing that she really was thankful.

"We're going to have to go to her old tower first. From there we may be able to tell where they went," Jack reasoned. "If you get what you need, we can take dragons there-unless I'm much mistaken?"

"No, I can get two of them ready," I assured them, nodding.

"Alright," Jack nodded in response. "Let's do this."

16. Chapter 14: Back in the Tower

**A/C **This goes back into the past a bit when returning to Rapunzel's point of view._

**Point of View: **Rapunzel
>

15/23

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><p>This was it, my final day off on my own. Needless to say, I

couldn't wait for the wedding, and was sure to pack up all my things before taking my hike out into the woods. Really, I didn't normally venture from the safety of the kingdom, but today was different. I wanted to go on a little adventure all of my own, breathe in the forests that lived here in my home kingdom before I was going to wed Merida. My mother had suggested it, figuring that it might be good to have a little time on my own before all the excitement. I took on the suggestion happily, deciding that it should be a grand adventure. So, with a map, Pascal, and enough food for a good meal, I ventured off on my own down a path that had been well trod by members of our kingdom.<p>

The forest was in full bloom and simply glowed with the radiance of such a sunny day. The birds flitted to and fro, flying from branch to branch and calling out merrily to one another. The trees were dappled with their usual leaves, which filled the sky completely, painting the sky a shimmering ray of greenery. The grass was also so lush, and I ran around with bare feet, enjoying the way that they tickled my toes.

I had hardly been going down the path for more than an hour when I heard the slightest stir behind me. Surely it's just some bunny in the brushes, I reasoned with myself, laughing inwardly at my uneasiness in an attempt to make it less apparent to myself. Really, I didn't venture out much on my own, and I might have been just a bit over skittery off in the woods. No, but there it was again, the sound of footsteps crunching down on brush. That was far too much sound for a rabbit, which generally managed the undergrowth with barely a sound.

"Hello?" I called out, glancing at Pascal, who was sitting on my shoulder and gave me a small shrug, then looking out into the undergrowth. The trees clustered more thickly in these parts of the woods, and I was unable to look past and see what lurked there. Hopefully this was just my imagination; such things had happened in the past, after all. I was a rather jumpy young woman. "Is anyone there?" I was tense now, unbelievably so, and I clutched my back full of food to my side, thinking that perhaps I could hit a ruffian over the head with it.

Suddenly a deer could be seen through the leaves, its large eyes staring out at me through the thicket between us.

"Oh thank goodness," I breathed, chuckling to myself. "Hello, pretty, I thought you might be a bit of trouble, I guess." I laugh at myself further, a nervous giggle that spoke my relief more than my words managed. I waved to the doe, gazing at its elegant figure, before it bounded off in the opposite direction.

"Hello, Rapunzel," a voice behind me sung softly. Oh no, oh please no... I knew that voice, all too well to. Turning around in my fright, I saw Mother Gothel standing before me, before everything turned black.

When I opened my eyes again, it was to a familiar sight set to a horizontal angle, since I was still cast down onto the ground. The tower's bedroom that I had grown up within swam into my vision, the pale evening light casting shadows upon the usually colorful stones that now seemed bleak and saturated in this faded light. What I also awoke to was a painful throb aching through my head, causing my

thoughts to come to me in a blurred jumble. A chain gripped my hands, keeping them pulled to the banister that led to a lower part of the tower, pinning me to the spot. I used my knees to force myself into a sitting position, struggling with heavy breathing, until eventually I was able to lean up against the banister, in effort to continue sitting up in such an awkward position since my hands were still tied behind me. From here I had a better view of the rest of the tower. Everything was dusty, disheveled, and almost completely barren from life. Almost, because I could depict a figure on the other end of the room, hunched over, her ragged blond bangs, hanging over her eyes. Mother Gothel was nowhere in sight.

"You're awake," this figure breathed, and despite the weariness that cloaked her voice, I could tell that there was strength beneath the tiredness that she contained now. "Sorry to tell you this, but some crazy witch has us locked up here. She's gone for now, but should be back anytime now. What's your name?"

"My name's Rapunzel," I answered, almost timidly. Yes, okay, I understood why Mother Gothel would want me here-for everlasting life, as was the case my entire life. But why another woman?

"Hey, I know you," she spoke up, struggling forward so her features were thrown into the light, a strip of a brown fabric keeping her hair back from her light green irises. Still I didn't recognize her. "Well, I've heard of you anyway. Rapunzel, you're a friend of Hiccup's."

"You know Hiccup?" I gasped.

"Yeah, name's Astrid," she smiled, a wary show of kindness that slipped from her features after less than a second had passed.

"Astrid...you're alive," I gaped, a small smile crawling across my features as well. Neither of us had much to celebrate over. Yeah, it was great that she was alive! Fantastic! But we were both still prisoners to a witch. "We all thought you were dead!"

"Not so much, just can't get out of here," she replied, chuckling dryly.

"I'll get us out of here, I promise," I assured her, nodding defiantly. Suddenly I spotted Pascal on the window sill, looking in on me nervously. "Pascal! Get out of here-I'll be fine. I need you to go tell the kingdom what happened. Go!" I uttered the last word as I heard the creak of the floorboards beneath us, announcing another person's presence. It was far too easy to guess who our guest was. In my worry I glanced down the staircase, spotting the top of her curly hair that was now grey. Looking back to the window, I saw that Pascal was gone.

"Welcome back, flower," Mother Gothel purred, grinning at me after she had mounted to our level. "I see you've become acquainted with Astrid here."

"Let her go," I commanded, staggering to my feet despite how it wore on my wrists that pulled up as far as they could to allow me on my feet. "You don't need Astrid for anything. You have me with my magical hair. Please, just let her go."

"Eager on your requests," she laughed, her tone with a steely edge to it. Looking back, she had always had that clip to her voice, but now I finally realized why. She had never loved me. Even though I had known that from other's stories, it was still a kick in the stomach to see it from her with my own eyes. "No, Rapunzel, you are wrong. I have plenty of use for Astrid. You see, flower, I have an ally now, who knows how to play these games of fear very well. We have a slight dilemma, now, don't we? You have friends who can be quite powerful given the chance. That is why both you and Astrid are here, because with enough distractions, it will be easy enough to kill them in one swoop instead of dragging it on and on."

"No-" I started fretfully, straining against my bondages just to fall to the ground. "Not them, please not them." Alas, I knew my words were useless-I had already sent Pascal to alert my family, who would surely end up telling my friends who were so very dear to me. They would come, and all I could do was hope that they were strong enough to take on this witch.

17. Chapter 15: Rescuer's Courage

**Point of View: **Jack

16/23

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><p>This wasn't right, in fact there couldn't be anything that was more wrong about this. Rapunzel had escaped, I had led her into the freedom of living with her actual parents, in a palace, where she was safe from witches. There was nothing at all right about the fact that she could be back there, chained up in her tower. If this really was the case, I had to save her, to bring her back to the safety of her parents. She had to be okay.<p>

And we neared in silence, the tower loomed towards me, never looking so menacing as it did now. There was no reason for it to look that way, since even the sun was still shining high in the sky-really, it had to be the context, the knowledge of what might be lying inside.

"Alright, here we are," I murmured towards the others, disturbing the silence. "We need to be careful, keep our heads-if they are here, Gothel's probably expecting someone to come with her."

Merida nodded, her angry head bobbing beside her. She held her bow in midflight, from on back of Toothless. She had stayed quiet the entire flight, looking as if she were going to burst from her tenseness and agitation at the idea of Rapunzel being in danger. But obviously, she kept her head, coming into the challenge ready.

Hiccup also nodded, crouching down to angle himself down, besides Toothless. We were ready. We landed outside the window, peering into the dimly lit room. Not much could be seen from the dim lighting of the one window, but I could make out the pale glow of blond hair, hear the rattle of chains.

"Rapunzel?" I whispered into the darkness, my staff raised in

protection, attempting to adjust my eyes to the dim light.

"Jack?" her voice emerged from the darkness. Rapunzel's face also could be seen, the pale light from the window falling upon her startled eyes that were wide with fear. "You need to get out here! It's a trap!" She says all this in a hushed whisper, jerking forward in the attempt to ward me away.

"We're not leaving without you," Merida promised beside me, jumping from Toothless's back and onto the room.

"No, Merida, please," Rapunzel begged, and she was not quite looking at Merida, but instead her gaze was glancing around, looking into the shadows.

Merida, of course, ignored her darling fiancée, and instead started working at unlocking the chains with a knife, trying to pick them open.

"Hiccup?" another voice said into the darkness, one that I recognized as none other than Astrid.

"Astrid?" Hiccup's voice exited his mouth horsesly, before he too moves off of the dragon and into the room.

"We need to get out of here," I muttered, shooting a blade of ice at Rapunzel's bonds and cutting her loose. "She could be coming any moment-"

Suddenly the shutters to the room banged shut, leaving us in the indistinguishable darkness. I rushed forward, banging on the shutters, attempting to open them to no avail.

"Look at you all, so trapped, you look awful," a silken female voice purred into the darkness, which seemed to take up the entire room at once, not revealing her placement. "Rapunzel's mine now; you're all mine. But she's the only one I have use for. I have been told that really, you're all the only ones who knows where she's hidden away at. With you dead, our secret will die as well."

"No!" Rapunzel shrieked, her back against Merida's, who was trying to aim into the darkness in an attempt to destroy Gothel. "Just...don't hurt them. I'll go with you, I won't put up a fight-just don't hurt them."

"It's fine, sunshine, we're getting out of this together," Merida hissed, her eyes narrowed as she tried to pick Gothel out from the darkness. "I promise."

"Oh, why make a promise you know you won't be able to fill?" Gothel's loud chuckle filled the room, casting a shiver down my spine. I held my staff aloft, narrowing my eyes. I attempted to shoot a beam of ice forward, towards where her voice might be coming from. But I couldn't see properly, and just managed to shoot the wall.

"Show yourself, coward!" I shouted angrily, my head jerking about in my search.

"Oh, why would I do that?" she hummed. "I have a new friend now, one who's showed me how to hide in the dark. Pitch Black was ofty fond of

your demise, Jack Frost."

I didn't have a clue of who she was talking about, but it hardly mattered, because right at that moment a large flash of light burst forth into view. The shutters splintered to bits as a ball of fire flew through the window, and into Mother Gothel, burning the evil witch to ashes. Toothless poked his head into the room, showing his obvious concern.

"Come on," I breathed, trying to not wrap my mind around what was going to happen next-it was a really selfish thing to do. I was just glad that Rapunzel was safe. "Let's get back."

18. Chapter 16:One Door Open, Another Closed

**A/C **Apologies for not updating, I've been out of town for the last few weeks.

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Point of View: Hiccup_

17/23

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><p>"Right, yeah," Merida whispered in response. She was crouched beside Rapunzel, and now that Mother Gothel was dead, her hands were no longer at her bow, so instead they were draped around Rapunzel, holding her close. to his side. "Shh, sunshine, it's okay. We're going to get you home. It's going to be okay." Merida leaned down, placing a soft kiss on her fiancée's forehead.<p>

"She's dead," Rapunzel whispered into Merida's shoulder, her eyes barely visible as they watched the ashes of Mother Gothel, frozen on them. "She's actually dead...the woman who raised me. I-I know she's evil and a witch, but it was so different...to actually see it for myself instead of just taking people's words for granted."

"I know, sunshine, but it's all okay now-I promise this is all over," Merida reminded Rapunzel, her voice unusually soft.

In all honesty, though, I wasn't paying them much heed beyond making sure that Rapunzel was alright. Instead, I was focused on the figure lying on the other side of the room, who I was now bent over-attempting to break her chains loose.

"You're alive," I breathed to Astrid, looking into those pale blue eyes.

"Still kicking," she offered a dry smile from where she's huddled on the floor.

"What happened?" I asked, holding her hands in mine. I couldn't believe that she was actually here, breathing and alive in front of me. It seemed completely impossible, really; it had been years since she'd disappeared-since she'd been reported dead.

"There was a storm-a black wave. Took me and the ship under and yet somehow I had survived. There was someone controlling the tide, with

the name Pitch Black. He spared me to bring me here-as bait for you all, apparently," Astrid answered, trying to sit up but still shackled down to the ground.

"The keys are over on the door," I barely heard Rapunzel communicate to Jack, who dashed down the stairs.

"I'm just glad you're alive," I whispered in response.

She reached up and planted a kiss on my lips. I felt my cheeks flame up at the motion. I...I did still love her, that much I was certain of-but I also loved Jack.

"Here," Jack thrust Astrid's keys between us. I hadn't heard him come back up but I supposed that he doesn't make much sound while flying. I looked over and saw that he had most definitely seen us kissing, because his voice was stony, his eyes unable to return my gaze with his lips barely parted.

"Thank you," I murmured in response, trying to shoot my apologetic notions into him. I would talk to him later about it; we'd sort everything all out. I unlocked Astrid with a gentle click of keys.

"Let's go," Jack urged, and before we all reported being ready to follow he flew out the window and back towards the kingdom.

"Right," I muttered, before leading everyone onto Toothless, who wasn't so happily with the large load of people. However, we managed.

They were beautiful, together perched upon the front of the crowd, their hands in each other's as vows were said. The ceremony was almost over, and the two young women would be wed to one another, as they deserved to be.

And yet somehow my eyes had fallen to the figure of Jack, who sat to the side, as they hadn't been able to preserve a spot for what others claimed to be their imaginary friend. They had also wanted to make Jack their best man next to me, but that hadn't been approved as something doable, as the parents didn't want the extended family to know their full grown ladies both still had a shared imaginary friend. Jack told them I was fine with this, but now he looked like he was possibly brooding on their wedding night. I was worried about him, I really was, and I wished that there was something I could do for him. Now I couldn't do more than stand there and celebrate Merida and Rapunzel's well deserved wedding-Jack had to wait.

"I do," Merida vowed, stepping forward and holding Rapunzel in her grasp as the _ next words, giving her a large kiss on the lips.

I didn't get to talk to Jack until after the party was over; in fact, he hadn't seemed to be at the rest of the night's festivities at all, which greatened my worry. He was sitting upon his staff at the edge of where the festivities were dispersing, the light of early morning upon the air.

"Are you alright?" I greeted warily, standing beside him and his staff.

"I'm not used to being around so many people I guess-with those amongst them who can see me," Jack muttered, not really seeming to concentrate on me. "I wanted to say goodbye before I left-I need a bit of time freezing up the land. I'm sure you understand."

"Yeah, of course," I responded, holding my breath within my cheeks as I prepared myself for the words that I knew were waiting in the air. "Look, Jack, I'm sorry about earlier, I-"

"No, really, I get it," Jack replied, his voice cracking slightly. "Astrid's always been the one you've been in love with-I was just there when you thought she was dead."

"No, Jack! That's not it at all!" I assured him, biting my lip. Didn't he get it? Didn't he understand that I loved him-that I had always loved him. "This isn't a very easy choice to make or thing to say-"

"I know," Jack interrupted. "That's why I'm going to spare you the decision. No, please don't interrupt-it's hard enough already. Seeing you and Astrid back together, watching Rapunzel and Merida marry, reminded me of the fact that we can't be together for the rest of our lives. I don't age, Hiccup-we can't grow old together or get married. And you, you deserve to have someone who can do that with you. Goodbye Hiccup, I love you." With those words, he sped off into the sky, letting the wind take him far, far away.

19. Chapter 17: Rusting Away

**Point of View:** Rapunzel_

18/23

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><p>We met less often now, the four of us in our pack of friends. It was sad, really, devastating. That's why I had insisted upon this meetup at Merida's and my house. This was something that had to happen, that she was counting on. Yes, it was over spectacular that I lived with Merida now, I couldn't express how happy it made me, but it really wasn't the same without the four of us together. Even Jack stopped by less often; he seemed to have taken a new solitary strike in the last few years, and he hasn't stayed around for more than a few nights since our wedding. Hiccup reported that Jack stopped by his place even less often now. I suppose he was a snow spirit or whatever, and needed to go about his duties making everything really cold, but that didn't make up for the fact of how much I missed him. It didn't sound like he was coming today either-we tried to get the message across to him last time he visited, but he had never actually said if he'd come back or not.<p>

Anyway, Hiccup was coming, and that was something. I got up from my chair, where I had been painting, and set the canvas down on the table.

"He's here!" Merida announced, her wild hair in a storm of curls as she showed her head around from the banister. "Hiccup's arrived!"

A grin flew across my face at these words. I quickly pushed back my

chair and dashed to follow Merida out of the doors. In my sprint our hands tangled together, and we continued onwards towards Hiccup. He'd pulled into shore in a single row boat from Berk, wanting to complete the journey on his own.

"Hello!" he greeted with a happy smile, stepping forward and embracing us both in a hug.

"It's so good to see you," I squeaked, realizing how long it really had been. At the sight of his face, I giggled. "You've gotten more than stubble now."

"Oh, right, that." He awkwardly reached up and placed his hand over the small beard on his chin. "I suppose it's growing out. You two look great, enjoying the life together."

"Yes," Merida nodded, her crazy hair bouncing as she did so. "But we miss you and Jack."

And the sound of Jack's name, Hiccup's smile slipped slightly. "Is he coming this time?"

I hesitated in my response, my shoulder falling slightly. "It doesn't look like it. Not this time."

"Right," Hiccup responded, his shoulders also falling. "Not any time, really."

"Come on, let's show you the castle," I attempted to distract him, even though I could tell that none of us were going to forget the presence that was missing here. But he agreed to come along, and Merida and I showed him about the grounds, and around our entire house, before we eventually settled at the dining table for lunch.

"Let's have a picnic," I suggested as they began to serve to where we were currently sitting. "Just like old times!"

"Sort of like old times," Hiccup mumbled. "We need us all here for it to be like old times."

"I know, we miss him too," Merida responded in a low voice, standing and pacing back and forth. We didn't know why Jack was less frequent, even though we had discussed the possibilities—we thought perhaps it was Jack just being more of a loner as he had been before we came along, or perhaps it was Astrid's return. Whatever the case, it worried us greatly. "We can eat here or away, whichever you'd prefer."

"No, that's alright," Hiccup sighed, rising as well. "Let's go and have a picnic."

Really, it was very close to old times, or at least as we could get to it. We all ate, drank, and talked about the passing time between our last encounter. It really had been a long time, and I found myself relaxing in their presence. We spent the day out in the woods, just as we had so many years before when all of us had been together, and yet we all felt the other presence that was missing.

Hours later, I lay awake in bed, Merida's arm around me and mine

around her. Her heavy breathing signaled the fact that she was fast asleep, but I couldn't make myself join her in that unconscious world, for my mind was elsewhere. No matter how much I tried to distract and trick my mind into sleeping, it kept dauntingly returning to Jack's absence. What had happened to him? How come he came so little these last years? He was different, that was certain, less careless and happy. Something was troubling him, that much was clear, and I wished there was something I could do to help-anything. He'd saved my life from Gothel twice, and I'd never been able to return the favor. Even if he hadn't been so helpful to me, I would have wanted to help him, because he was my friend, and we stuck together. I stirred slightly in my thoughts, though not enough to disturb Merida. I missed him, so much. It was clear that everyone else did, too. It was an evil sort of missing, that tore into my soul and ate away at my mind, because he was one of my best friends and it had been hard enough not seeing him more often than a few days a month, and now...

Eventually I did fall asleep, but the rest didn't fill that aching hole for my frosty friend.

20. Chapter 18: Hearts Breaking

_A/C**** __I have no real excuse for being so terrible at updating besides school and the usual stresses. It should be noted however that this chapter was greatly inspired by my Beta 2806257 who came up with the idea, later writing her Mercury Falling based around the same idea (which if you haven't read I really suggest) but it should be noted I wasn't aware she was going to write it as well before I had outlined my own piece. And yes I have permission and all of that. Enjoy the pain!_

Point of View:**** Jack

****_19/23_****

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><p>I missed them all, the three friends I had in the entire world, more than I could really bear. It destroyed to leave them all so suddenly, and without explanation too. But I couldn't explain, not really. Hiccup probably believed it was because I was upset about our breakup, which he was partially right about. When it came to it however, that wasn't the main reason, just a cause branching out from the wasp's nest of doubtful thoughts. Why I had really left for such a long period, only stopping by every few months to make sure they were still doing well, was because I had stopped fooling myself into believing that this could go on forever. I went on forever; they didn't; which doesn't leave an immortality for us. From both seeing Hiccup with Astrid and watching Merida and Rapunzel's wedding, I realized with such a sinking feeling that they were growing up. They weren't kids anymore, who would spend all day with their imaginary friend, riding dragons and camping in the starlight. And I needed to let them go, let them grow up into the fantastic people I knew them as-I couldn't weigh them down in the eyes of everyone else. That's why I had left them, to give them time to grow apart from me, building up their own lives. Although, one thing that I was positive of was that they they wouldn't forget me-stop believing or anything like that. Those three, they were true friends who I could count on.

That's why, six years later, when the lack of interaction became so unbearable and I really could not stand to be apart from them any longer, I did decide to go and meet up with them, really spend some quality time beside them. It had been a long time since I had even checked up on them, but I didn't even bother getting nervous-It would be amazing being with them once again.<p>

First I blew myself over to Merida and Rapunzel's castle, knowing that if the three of them were meeting together it would be more likely at their house. When I arrived, it was raining, which quickly changed to a snow in my presence despite the fact that it was nearly summer. They were probably home, at this point of the day, especially with the wet weather. I unlatched a window and flew inside.

"Hey, is anyone home?" I called, laughing into the empty room as I saw the trace of a shadow curve around the doorway and a woman with frizzy red hair appeared at the doorway. At the sight of me she grinned, a laugh exploding from her mouth with the same passion that it always held. "Sunshine, come here!"

Rapunzel's face quickly appeared as well, coming to stand next to Merida as they both walked into the room, straining in the center, their gaze still settled on me as I stood on the edge of the window frame.

"Wow you two look great, how's married life treating you?" I greeted, the usual teasing edge to my voice.

"I don't believe it!" Rapunzel gasped, coming even closer, her eyes meeting mine. But there was something strange about her gaze, that contained less warmth than it had before, something unfocused. Suddenly she leaned forward, through me, sticking her head out the window. I couldn't help it, I jolted back out of the window, unable to believe that what I was feeling was real. No, no, she can't-she wouldn't...she couldn't have stopped believing in me! I was her best friend! I saved her from Gothel-twice. I had been there since she had been four or younger-I couldn't even recall the age. I barely heard the next words she spoke, for they hardly mattered. "It's snowing again in June."

"Unbelievable, really," Merida laughed, and her carefree voice stung, burned me deep inside like the fireball I always claimed her to be. The word she used just added to the agony; unbelievable; because they didn't believe, they really didn't believe after all this time. That's what was so unbelievable to me. They didn't believe in me...they had actually forgotten-these were my friends, two of the only three friends I had left. And suddenly I couldn't stay there, and I forced myself back into the air, wishing that I could feel the cold, because then there would be some sort of numbing sensation versus this horrible, horrible agony. I rushed back towards Hiccup's home in Berk, trying to fight down the panic that was attempting to force its ugly head up my throat. He couldn't have stopped believing in me-that just wasn't something he would do. He had promised, and I tried and focus on this instead of the fact that both Rapunzel and Merida had promised just the same. They had promised to always remember and believe in me for as long as they were alive. But Hiccup couldn't have fallen as low as they had; he had told me once that he loved me-no one can just forget a feeling like that.

I spotted him walking home, down the familiar path that he took from

that lake he had trained Toothless by, back to the village. This time I was nervous, more like downright terrified. He couldn't have forgotten, he just...couldn't have. But I was scared enough to not shout out right away; instead, I whispered his name, because that was a safe bet. He didn't turn around, and no matter what, I could continue to hope that he just didn't hear me. But I couldn't put this off forever, so I did fly over to his side, attempting to look more confident than I felt.

"Hey, Hiccup," I greeted, trying to keep my tone casual even though my words were trembling.

He didn't say anything. Didn't show any sort of response. There was nothing.

The panic did burst forth then, and I flew in front of him, putting my hands out in attempt to stop him. He had to see me, he just... Not Hiccup, no, please not him. I couldn't...couldn't bear a life without him knowing that I was there. I needed him to believe. "No, Hiccup, no!" I croaked; I wanted to scream it, to belt it to the air since no one could hear me. Might as well. But I couldn't manage even that, not now...

"You can't do this, please," I was begging now, so completely possessed by my need for him to respond. "I still love you... please."

He continued to walk.

I couldn't take it anymore. He didn't love me, didn't even care about me enough to believe that I was real. Had none of our past meant anything to him? Did any of it matter? I flew off into the sky, not knowing if I was going anywhere besides away.

21. Chapter 19: And Then There Were Three

**Point of View:** Merida

20/23

* * *

><p>Life passes too quickly, one moment you stumble across a person in your life, the next they're dying, I reflected, dragging our two person boat on shore for this voyage I had traveled with Rapunzel. This would probably be our last such journey, despite the two of us still being fit, we were both aging rapidly. Besides, if what I heard was true, this may be my last reason for such a trip.<p>

"Are you ready?" I asked Rapunzel, clutching her hand. She nodded, and I could tell that she was already tearful before we had even greeted Hiccup. We went up the familiar village path, and into the great hall where we had been told that Hiccup is. The doors however, were closed, guards standing at the entrance, both of them very sober and solemn. As we walked I put a shoulder around Rapunzel's shoulder, shielding her both from the sadness and the strange chill that had followed us here the entire journey, cold enough that we had even watched a piece of the ocean freeze beside us at one point.

"Is he...?" I asked, glancing between the two men anxiously.

"You made it in time, your majesties," one of them assured, bowing his head and heaving the doors open. "Thank you for coming."

"How could we not," Rapunzel nodded, swiftly entering at my side. The room was poorly lit, but both Rapunzel and I knew the chamber so well, that we were able to rush through it without problems, coming to the warmly lit bed that had been placed in this hall because Hiccup had wanted to be in here. Because Hiccup had wanted to die here.

"Hiccup," I greeted, falling to his bedside beside Rapunzel, lifting my hand to feel over. "We came as soon as we could. How are you?"

"Tired, but I suppose that is to be expected," Hiccup's laugh comes out dryly, a cough following his words. "The doctors say I have hours left...maybe it'll be a blessing to go, I lived a whole life, there's nothing to be regretted now since I know I can die in your company. My friends... Merida and Rapunzel...and Jack. Remember all of our time together? The best of times..."

"Jack?" Rapunzel murmured confusedly. "He's not here, remember, he was our imaginary friend."

Hiccup paused, his unfocused eyes tilted to the side of us for a following moment. "No, I never forgot you-never stopped believing. No, no you see I had days of doubts, you were gone for so long."

"Hiccup, there's no one there," I insisted, pained by how he was putting so much more effort into talking to the thin air that he was close to actually sitting up in his old age.

Still, Hiccup ignored us and continued talking. "After all of this time? Yes, me as well. To the point where I thought I was crazy when I doubted... I... yes...I have missed you. Goodbye, all of my friends...goodbye." Then he froze, his voice no longer leaving his frail lips, his eyes glossing over.

Rapunzel let loose a sob, and I held her closer to my side.

"Goodbye, Hiccup," I whispered, reaching forward and brushing his eyelids down so he could sleep properly.

22. Chapter 20: Conclusion?

**Point of View:** Jack_

22/23

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><p>That, really, is all there is to tell of the big four. Merida and Rapunzel both died of old age, neither of them remembering me as last minute as Hiccup did. For them, I'm just the imaginary friend who tagged along with them back when they're imaginations ran

rapid-didn't matter that such a nonexistent being is supposedly what rescued Rapunzel from a tower, or brought them all together. But honestly, I don't feel bitter; it might be for the best that they forgot. It hurts, more than anything I could possibly express, them being the only people in the world who cared as much for me as I did them in return. Even so, I wouldn't take any of it back or do any of it over another way, because until the very end, I loved every minute of it. I loved the days picnicking and riding dragons, of camping out under the stars, but more than anything, I loved them; Hiccup, Merida, and Rapunzel-the three royals, the three who believed.<p>

* * *

><p>I swear this isn't actually the end.**

23. Epilogue

**Point of View:** Jack

**Present tense, as he's not telling the story anymore**

23/23

* * *

><p>The story at an end, I fly from my perch amongst the snow, setting a smile on my face despite the fact that happiness isn't something that comes easily right now. I miss them, the three royals, so completely and utterly. It's been years since their deaths and it's still a hard thing to think about. At least I'm not alone anymore; there's the other Guardians who I'm now a part of, Pitch long gone from his fruitless attempt to make the world one of fear. I hop onto a large fir tree, twirling to the top and letting the north wind skirt my face with its gentle blast.<p>

Suddenly, I spot something sticking through the leaves of a nearby tree, my eyes glancing across the small surface. No, it can't be. I flew over to the tree, clinging onto the branches with one hand, as I pull a long arrow out of the tree with another. Ridiculously, I know this arrow. It's one of Merida's handicrafts. No, but it can't-it can't. That is literally impossible, Merida is dead. And yet, as I hold the familiar weapon in my hands, I see the smallest flash of red dart about the corner of my vision, flickering out of view. Letting a bout of laughter leave my lips, I follow what I have to see as somehow being Merida. It's impossible, but I have to hope as I fly into the air, my eyes trailing a moving fury of a fiery orange that darts about the line of trees. When it finally comes to a clearing, I zoom down upon it, accidentally crashing into the streak of color, my own figure entangling in a mass of limbs and curls, colliding to the ground in a tangled mass.

"Jack?" a Scottish accent questions, the very sound of her voice stirring up memories of so many days behind. A laugh escaping my lips, I look up to spot that sitting on the ground beside me is no other than the beaming figure of Merida Dunbroch, somehow her face glowing exactly as it had the night after escaping her assigned marriage.

"Merida!" I greeted, breathing my disbelief with unstoppable laughter. "You're alive! You're here! How...?"

She snorts at first, her gleaming blue eyes narrowing with happiness. "Depends on your definition of alive. I did die, fully and completely-but I'm back now so that's all good."

"You're back?" I question, unable to believe or make sense of what I was hearing. "How?"

"Isn't it obvious, Frosty?" Merida laughs, shaking her head with her wild curls following her movement. "I'm a Guardian. After I died, the man in the moon made me a guardian like you, gave me a new life back in a body that wasn't dying from old age. Apparently I'm the Guardian of true love-" She rolls her eyes at this thought. "-with the name Cupid, but you should still call me Merida, I still find the whole thing too strange."

"You're really a Guardian?" I ask, bouncing to my feet in my excitement. "And of love?"

"Shove off, Jack," she growls, her smile unable to leave her lips. "I s'pose I did stop arranged marriages in my life."

"Yeah, it suits you," I smirk, the teasing ebbing from my own voice slightly.

"I'm not the only one either, both Rapunzel and Hiccup are guardians too. We've been trying to find you but it's been harder than we thought, it's taken us awhile," Merida-or should I say Cupid-explains. "We've sort of found a spot together, settled in as our Guardians. I can bring you to them if you'd like."

"That would be great!" I respond, unable to contain my excitement. They're really back, completely alive. Our story may be one that few will hear about, but it is one that is not complete.

* * *

><p>AC _**The very ending of the story, set up for the sequel. It will come along, but I'm not sure quite when since the plot bunnies are still settling. Thank you all so much for being so supportive of this story-I never expected for this or really any of my stories to be this successful. And yes, I know the explanation on them as guardians isn't full, but I'll clarify that all completely in the sequel. I hope you enjoyed!

End
file.